15¢

ISSUED MONTHLY

Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries

FEB. 1940

RED STAR MAGAZINE FEB.

WEIRD !
Stilson - The Sky Woman

ASTOUNDING !
Hall - Man Who Saved *the* Earth

AMAZING !
Merritt - Conquest *of the* Moon Pool

EERIE !
Withrow - The Kiss *of* Death

STRANGE !
Grover - Plunge *of the* "Knupfen"

STARTLING !
Binder - Son *of the* Stars

THRILLING !
Farley - The Radio Man

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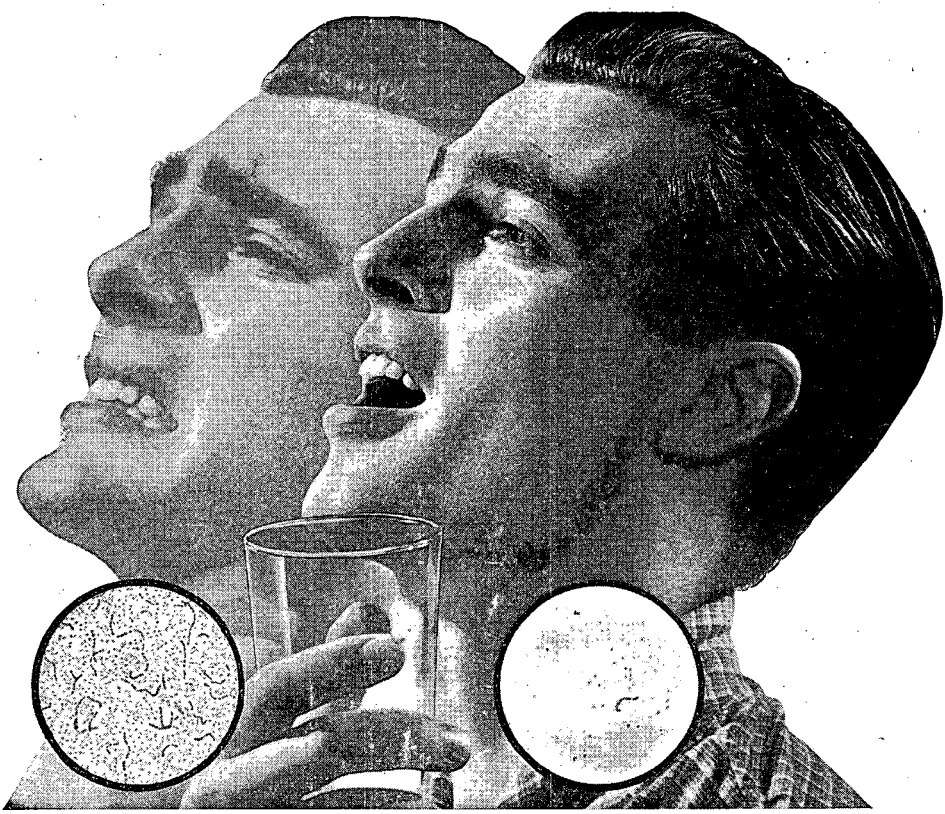

NOTE HOW LISTERINE REDUCED GERMS: The two drawings above illustrate height of range in germ reductions on mouth and throat surfaces in test cases before and after gargling Listerine Antiseptic. Fifteen minutes after gargling, germ reductions up to 96.7% were noted; and even one hour after, germs were still reduced as much as 80%.

AT THE FIRST SYMPTOM OF A COLD OR SORE THROAT—

Listerine quick!

Listerine Antiseptic reaches way back on the throat surfaces to kill "secondary invaders" . . . the very-types of germs that make a cold more troublesome.

This prompt and frequent use of full strength Listerine Antiseptic may keep a cold from getting serious, or head it off entirely . . . at the same time relieving throat irritation when due to a cold.

This is the experience of countless people and it is backed up by some of the sanest, most impressive research work ever attempted in connection with cold prevention and relief.

Fewer Colds, Tests Showed

Actual tests conducted on all types of people in several industrial plants over 8 years revealed this astonishing truth: That those who gargled Listerine Antiseptic twice daily had fewer colds and milder colds than non-users, and fewer sore throats.

This impressive record is explained by Listerine Antiseptic's germ-killing action . . . its ability to kill threatening "secondary invaders" — the very types of germs that breed in the mouth and throat and are largely responsible, many authorities say, for the bothersome aspects of a cold.

Germ Reductions Up to 96.7%

Even 15 minutes after Listerine Antiseptic gargle, tests have shown bacterial reductions on mouth and throat surfaces ranging to 96.7%. Up to 80% an hour afterward.

In view of this evidence, don't you think it's a sensible precaution against colds to gargle with Listerine Antiseptic systematically twice a day and oftener when you feel a cold getting started?

LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY, *St. Louis, Mo.*

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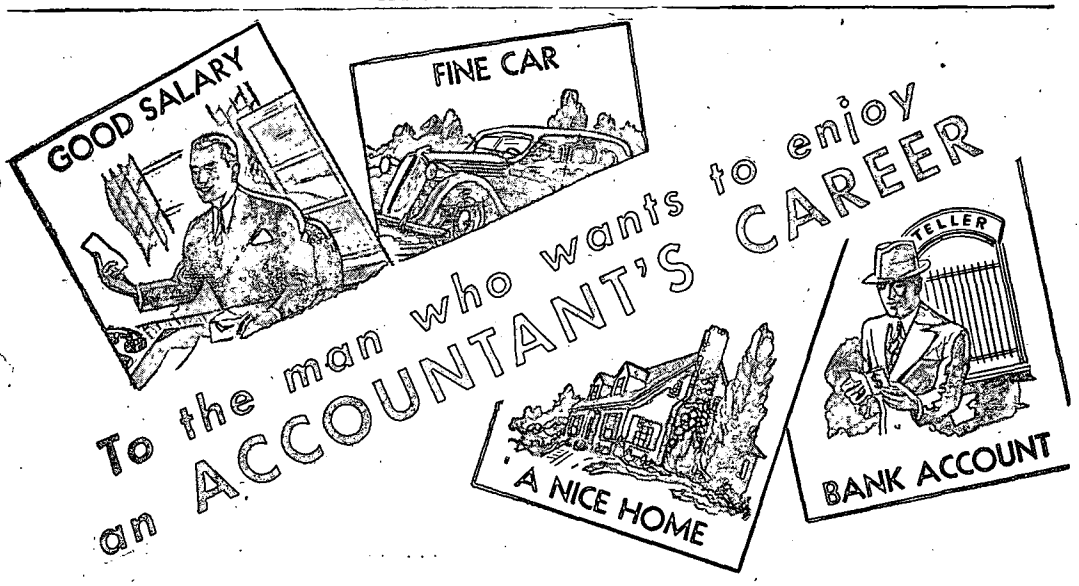


IF you're that man, here's something that will interest you.

Not a magic formula—not a get-rich-quick scheme—but something more substantial, more practical.

Of course, you need something more than just the desire to be an accountant. You've got to pay the price—be willing to study earnestly, thoroughly.

Still, wouldn't it be worth your while to sacrifice some of your leisure in favor of interesting home study—over a comparatively brief period in your life? Always provided that the rewards were good—a salary of $2,000 to $10,000?

An accountant's duties are interesting, varied and of real worth to his employers. He has *standing!*

Do you feel that such things aren't for you? Well, don't be too sure. Very possibly they *can* be!

Why not, like so many before you, investigate LaSalle's modern Problem Method of training for an accountancy position?

Just suppose you were permitted to work in a large accounting house under the personal supervision of an expert accountant. Suppose, with his aid, you studied accounting principles and solved problems day by day—easy ones at first—then the more difficult ones. If you could do this—and if you could turn to him for advice as the problems became complex—soon you'd master them all.

That's the training you follow in principle under the LaSalle Problem Method.

You cover accountancy from the basic Principles right up through Accountancy Systems and Income Tax Procedure. Then you add C. P. A. Training and prepare for the C. P. A. examinations.

As you go along, you absorb the principles of Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Statistical Control, Organization, Management and Finance.

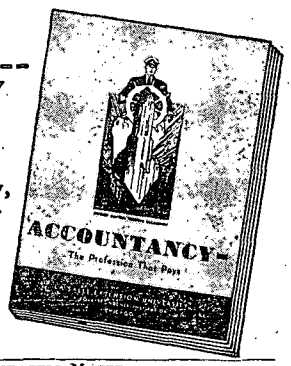
Your progress is as speedy as you care to make it—depending on your own eagerness to learn and the time you spend in study.

Will recognition come? The only answer, as you know, is that success *does* come to the man who is really *trained.* It's possible your employers will notice your improvement in a very few weeks or months. Indeed, many LaSalle graduates have paid for their training—with increased earnings—before they have completed it! For accountants, who are trained in organization and management, are the executives of the future.

Write For This Free Book

For your own good, don't put off investigation of *all* the facts. Write for our free 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays." It'll prove that accountancy offers brilliant futures to those who aren't afraid of serious home study. Send us the coupon *now.*

Over 1850 Certified Public Accountants among LaSalle alumni



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I want to be an accountant. Send me, without cost or obligation, the 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays," and full information about your accountancy training program.

Name.....

Address..... *City*.....

Position..... *Age*.....

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Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries

Vol. 1 FEBRUARY, 1940 No. 5

Coming in the March Issue!

The great story you have all been asking for!

THE BLIND SPOT

By Austin Hall and Homer Eon Flint

For reasons that will be apparent to the reader, we are not going to synopsize this famous story at all. It is a fantastic story, a super-fantastic, so strange, so weird, that any attempt to write a synopsis would be futile. So do not fail to start it at the beginning.

It is a story which has always been a collectors' item in the fantastic field. People remember it and talk about it, but have found it impossible to get. Your big chance is coming in the next issue. Don't miss it!

Look for it on the newsstands February 7

Also——

The Planet Juggler

A Complete Novelet

By J. George Frederick

A thrilling science fiction adventure in which a Napoleon of the Universe holds all the strings of destiny.

ASTOUNDING!

The Man Who Saved the Earth. Austin Hall 6

They laughed at his elaborate preparations—and then the Hour came

WEIRD!

The Sky Woman.....Charles B. Stilson 33

Her perfection was truly unearthly

AMAZING!

The Conquest of the Moon Pool..A. Merritt 48

In Six Parts—Part IV

STARTLING!

Son of the Stars.....Eando Binder 70

A new story of interplanetary adventure

THRILLING!

The Radio Man.....Ralph Milne Farley 80

Parts III and IV

EERIE!

The Kiss of Death.....Laura Withrow 111

Hate defied the barriers of the grave

STRANGE!

The Plunge of the "Knupfen" Leonard Grover 116

A story of an amazing dive to the world's heart, and a lover a thousand years younger than his bride

The Readers' Viewpoint..... 126

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WILLIAM T. DEWART, *President*

THE CONTINENTAL PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS, LTD.
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The March Issue Will Be On Sale February 7

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It Shows How I Train You at Home in Your Spare Time for a

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Clip the coupon and mail it. I'm certain I can train you at home in your spare time to be a Radio Technician. I will send you my first lesson free. Examine it, read it, see how clear and easy it is to understand. Judge for yourself whether my course is planned to help you get a good job in Radio, a young, growing field with a future. You don't need to give up your present job, or spend a lot of money to become a Radio Technician. I train you at home in your spare time.

Jobs Like These Go to Men Who Know Radio

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians and pay well for trained men. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs with opportunities for advancement. Radio jobbers and dealers employ installation and service men. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio; loudspeaker systems, electronic devices, are newer fields offering good opportunities to qualified men. And my Course includes Television, which promises to open many good jobs soon.

I TRAINED THESE MEN

Service Manager for Four Stores

"I was working in a garage when I enrolled with N.R.I. In a few months I made enough to pay for the course three or four times. I am now Radio service manager for the M - - - Furniture Co. for their four stores."—JAMES E. RYAN, 1543 Slade St., Fall River, Mass.

Owns Shop, Makes $3,000 a Year

"Before taking your Course I earned about 17½ cents per hour as a truck driver. When I had completed 20 lessons I started service work. During the last year I have made about $3,000 in Radio. I now own my own shop."—KARL KELLY, 306 W. Calhoun St., Magnolia, Ark.

$10 to $20 a Week in Spare Time

"I repaired many Radio sets when I was on my tenth lesson. I have made an average of $10 to $20 a week—just spare time."—JOHN JERRY, 1529 Arapahoe St., Denver, Colo.

Why Many Radio Technicians Make $30, $40, $50 a Week

Radio is already one of the country's large industries even though it is still young and growing. The arrival of Television, the use of Radio principles in industry, are but a few of many recent Radio developments. More than 28,000,000 homes have one or more Radios. There are more Radios than telephones. Every year millions of Radios get out of date and are replaced. Millions more need new tubes, repairs, etc. Over 5,000,000 auto Radios are in use and thousands more are being sold every day. In every branch Radio is offering more opportunities—opportunities for which I give you the required knowledge of Radio at home in your spare time. Yes, the few hundred $30, $40, $50 a week jobs of 20 years ago have grown to thousands.

Many Make $5 to $10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, in addition to my regular course, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do actual Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training, I send plans and directions which have helped many make from $200 to $500 a year in spare time while learning.

You Get Practical Experience While Learning

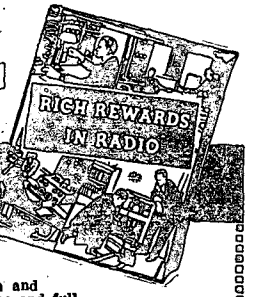
I send you special Radio equipment; show you how to conduct experiments, build circuits illustrating important principles used in modern Radio and Television receivers, broadcasting station and loudspeaker installations. My 50-50 method of training gives you both printed instruction and actual work with Radio parts—makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL, ALL-WAVE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make more money fixing Radio sets while learning and to equip you with a professional instrument for full time work after you graduate.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act today. Mail the coupon for Sample Lesson and my 64-page Book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." They point out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tell about my Course in Radio and Television; show letters from men I have trained telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. OBK,
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

MAIL COUPON NOW!



GOOD FOR BOTH 64 PAGE BOOK SAMPLE LESSON FREE

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. OBK
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Send me FREE, without obligation, your Sample Lesson and 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio" which tells about Radio's spare time and full-time opportunities and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home to be Radio Technicians. (Write Plainly).

NAME.....AGE.....

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30x4.50-21	2.40	1.15
28x4.75-19	2.45	1.25
29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25
29x5.00-19	2.65	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.65	1.25
5.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.40
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.40
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.55
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.75
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31x4	2.95	1.25
32x4	2.95	1.25
33x4	2.95	1.25
34x4	3.25	1.35
32x4½	3.35	1.45

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(High Pressure)

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34x5	4.25	2.25
32x6	7.95	2.95
36x6	9.95	4.45

TRUCK BALLOON TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
6.00-20	$3.75	$1.65
6.50-20	4.45	1.95
7.00-20	5.95	2.95
ALL OTHER SIZES		

Size	Tires	Tubes
33x4½	$3.45	$1.45
34x4½	3.45	1.45
30x5	3.65	1.65
33x5	3.75	1.75
35x5	3.95	1.75

Size	Tires	Tubes
34x7	$10.95	$4.65
36x7	10.95	4.65
36x8	11.45	4.95
40x8	13.25	4.95

Size	Tires	Tubes
9.00-20	$6.95	$3.75
9.25-20	8.95	4.95
10.00-20	10.95	5.65
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SONG POEMS WANTED AT ONCE! MOTHER, HOME, LOVE, PATRIOTIC, SACRED, COMIC OR ANY SUBJECT. DON'T DELAY—SEND YOUR POEM TODAY FOR IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION. RICHARD BROS., 61 WOODS BLDG., CHICAGO

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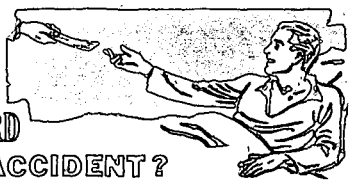

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No agent will call.

Please mail me at once complete information and how to get the Elgin policy for free inspection without obligation.

Name .....

Address .....

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The Man Who Saved the Earth

By AUSTIN HALL

He rushed alone and unafraid to the rim of eternity, armed with a theory of salvation which in unworried days would have made the shrewdest scientist laugh

A Complete Novelet

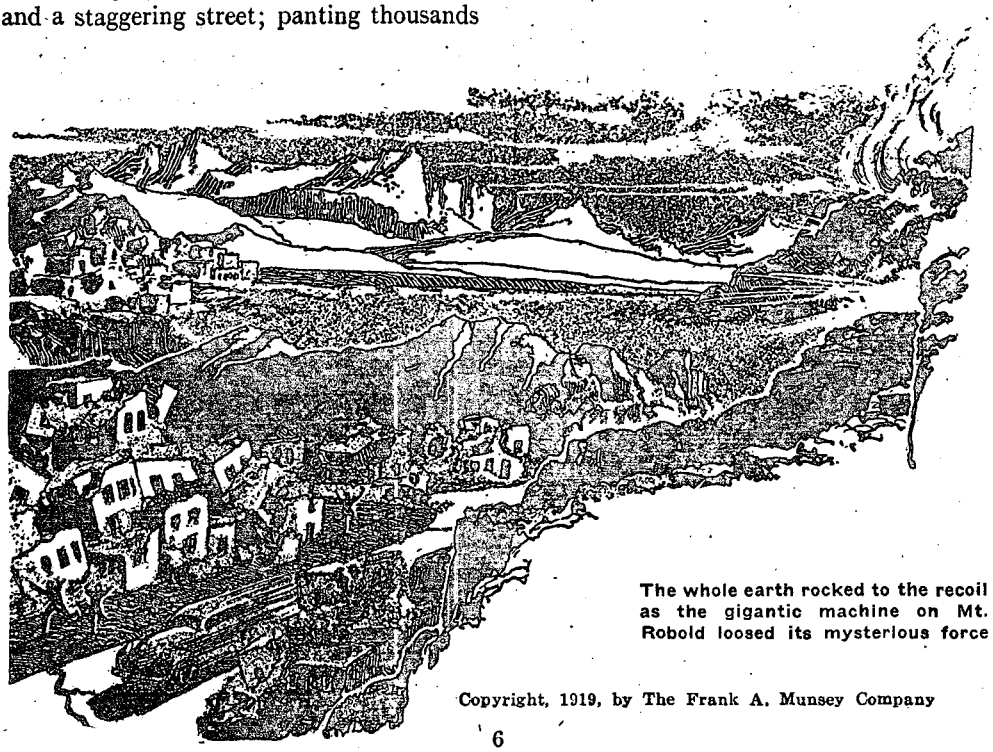
CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNING

EVEN the beginning. From the start the whole thing has the precision of machine work. Fate and its working—and the wonderful Providence which watches over Man and his future. The whole thing unerring: the incident, the work, the calamity, and the martyr. In the retrospect of disaster we may all of us grow strong in wisdom. Let us go into history.

A hot July day. A sun of scant pity, and a staggering street; panting thousands dragging along, hatless; the sultry vengeance of a real day of summer. A day of hot pavements, and wrecked endeavor, heartaches for the seashore, for leafy bowers beside rippling water, a day of broken hopes and listless ambition.

Perhaps Fate chose the day because of its heat and because of its natural benefit on fecundity. We have no way of knowing. But we do know this: the date, the time, the meeting; the boy with the burning glass and the old doctor. So commonplace, so trivial and hidden in obscurity!



The whole earth rocked to the recoil as the gigantic machine on Mt. Robold loosed its mysterious force

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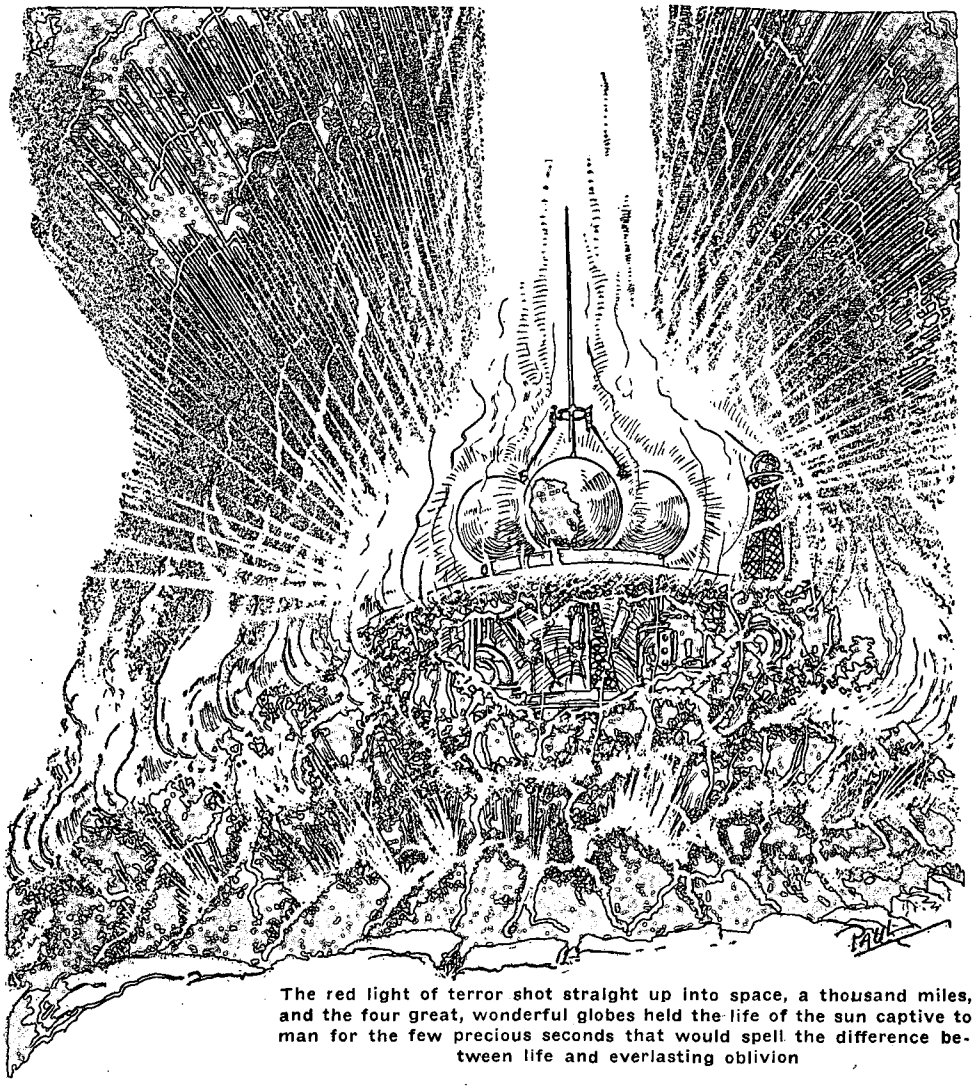

The red light of terror shot straight up into space, a thousand miles, and the four great, wonderful globes held the life of the sun captive to man for the few precious seconds that would spell the difference between life and everlasting oblivion

Who would have guessed it? Yet it is—after the creation—one of the most important dates in the world's history.

This is saying a whole lot. Let us go into it and see what it amounts to. Let us trace the thing out in history, weigh it up and balance it with sequence.

Of Charley Huyck we know nothing up to this day. It is a thing which, for some reason, he has always kept hidden. Recent investigation as to his previous life and antecedents have availed us nothing. Perhaps he could have told us; but as he has gone down as the world's great martyr, there is no hope of gaining from his lips what we would so like to know.

After all, it does not matter. We have the day—the incident, and its purport, and its climax of sequence to the day of the great disaster. Also we have the blasted mountains and the lake of blue water which will ever live with his memory. His greatness is not of warfare, nor personal ambition; but of all mankind. The wreaths that we bestow upon him have no doubtful color. The man who saved the earth!

From such a beginning, Charley Huyck, lean and frail of body, with, even then,

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the wistfulness of the idealist, and the eyes of a poet. Charley Huyck, the boy, crossing the hot pavement with his pack of papers; the much treasured piece of glass in his pocket, and the sun which only he should master burning down upon him. A moment out of the ages; the turning of a straw destined to out-balance all the previous accumulation of man's history.

The sun was hot and burning, and the child—he could not have been more than ten—cast a glance over his shoulder. It was in the way of calculation. In the heyday of childhood he was not dragged down by the heat and weather; he had the enthusiasm of his half-score of years and the joy of the plaything. We will not presume to call it the spirit of the scientist, though it was, perhaps, the spark of latent investigation that was destined to lead so far.

A moment picked out of destiny! A boy and a plaything. Uncounted millions of boys have played with glass and the sun rays. Who cannot remember the little, round-burning dot in the palm of the hand and the subsequent exclamation? Charley Huyck had found a new toy; it was a simple thing and as old as glass. Fate will ever be so in her working.

And the doctor? Why should he have been waiting? If it was not destiny, it was at least an accumulation of moment. In the heavy eye-glasses, the square, close-cut beard; and his uncompromising fact-seeking expression. Those who knew Dr. Robold are strong in the affirmation that he was the antithesis of all emotion. He was the sternest product of science: unbending, hardened by experiment, and caustic toward the frailness of human nature.

It had been his one function to topple over the castles of the foolish; with his hard-seeing wisdom he had spotted sophistry where we thought it not. Even into the castles of science he had gone like a juggernaut. It is hard to have one's theories derided—yea, even for a scientist—and to be called a fool! Dr. Robold knew no middle language; he was not relished by science.

HIS memory, as we have it, is that of an eccentric. A man of slight compassion, abrupt of manner and with no tact in speaking. Genius is often so; it is a strange fact that many of the greatest of men have been denied by their fellows. A great man and laughter. He was not accepted.

None of us know today what it cost Dr. Robold. He was not the man to tell us. Perhaps Charley Huyck might; but his lips are sealed forever. We only know that he retired to the mountain, and of the subsequent flood of benefits that rained upon mankind. And we still denied him. The great cynic on the mountain. Of the secrets of the place we know little. He was not the man to accept the investigator; he despised the curious. He had been laughed at—let be—he would work alone on the great moment of the future.

In the light of the past we may well bend knee to the doctor and his protégé, Charley Huyck. Two men and destiny! What would we be without them? One shudders to think.

A little thing, and yet one of the greatest moments in the world's history. It must have been Fate. Why was it that this stern man, who hated all emotion, should so have unbended at this moment? That we cannot answer. But we can conjecture. Mayhap it is this: We were all wrong; we accepted the man's exterior and profession as the fact of his marrow.

No man can lose all emotion. The doctor was, after all, even as ourselves—he was human. Whatever may be said, we have the certainty of that moment, and of Charley Huyck.

The sun's rays were hot; they were burning; the pavements were intolerable; the baked air in the cañoned street was dancing like that of an oven; a day of dog-days. The boy crossing the street; his arms full of papers, and the glass bulging in his little hip-pocket.

At the curb he stopped. With such a sun it was impossible to long forget his plaything. He drew it carefully out of his pocket, laid down a paper and began

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distancing his glass for the focus. He did not notice the man beside him. Why should he? The round dot, the brownish smoke, the red spark and the flash of flame! He stamped upon it. A moment out of boyhood; an experimental miracle as old as the age of glass, and just as delightful. The boy had spoiled the name of a great Governor of a great State; but the paper was still salable. He had had his moment. Mark that moment.

A hand touched his shoulder. The lad leaped up.

"Yessir. *Star* or *Bulletin?*"

"I'll take one of each," said the man. "There now. I was just watching you. Do you know what you were doing?"

"Yessir. Burning paper. Startin' fire. That's the way the Indians did it."

The man smiled at the perversion of fact. There is not such a distance between sticks and glass in the age of childhood.

"I know," he said. "The Indians. But do you know how it was done; the why—why the paper began to blaze?"

"Yessir."

"All right, explain."

The boy looked up at him. He was a city boy and used to the streets. Here was some old high-brow challenging his wisdom. Of course he knew.

"It's the sun."

"There," laughed the man. "Of course. You said you knew, but you don't. Why doesn't the sun, without the glass, burn the paper? Tell me that."

The boy was still looking up at him; he saw that the man was not like the others on the street. It may be that the strange intimacy kindled into being at that moment. Certainly it was a strange unbending for the doctor.

"It would if it was hot enough or you could get enough of it together."

"Ah! Then that is what the glass is for, is it?"

"Yessir."

"Concentration?"

"Con—I don't know, sir. But it's the sun. She's sure some hot. I know a lot about the sun, sir. I've studied it with the glass. The glass picks up all the rays and puts them in one hole and that's what burns the paper.

"It's lots of fun. I'd like to have a bigger one; but it's all I've got. Why, do you know, if I had a glass big enough and a place to stand, I'd burn up the earth?"

The old man laughed. "Why, Archimedes! I thought you were dead."

"My name ain't Archimedes. It's Charley Huyck."

"Oh, is it? Well, that's a good name, too. And if you keep on you'll make it as famous as you did the other." Wherein he was foretelling history. "Where do you live?"

The boy was still looking. Ordinarily he would not have told, but he motioned back with his thumb.

"I don't live; I room over on Brennan Street."

"Oh, I see. You room. Where's your mother?"

"Search me; I never saw her."

"I see; and your father?"

"How do I know? He went floating when I was four years old."

"Floating?"

"Yessir—to sea."

"So your mother's gone and your father's floating. Archimedes is adrift. You go to school?"

"Yessir. Number Twenty-six. Sixth Grade. Say, it's hot. I can't stand here all day. I've got to sell my papers."

The man pulled out a purse.

"I'll take the lot," he said. Then kindly: "My boy, I would like to have you go with me."

It was a strange moment. A little thing with the fates looking on. When destiny plays she picks strange moments. This was one. Charley Huyck went with Dr. Robold.

CHAPTER II

THE POISON PALL

WE ALL of us remember that fatal day when the news startled out of Oakland. No one can forget it. At first

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it read like a newspaper hoax, in spite of the oft-proclaimed veracity of the press, and we were inclined to laughter. 'Twixt wonder at the story and its impossibility we were not a little enthused at the nerve of the man who put it over.

It was in the days when the world had grown populous and of well-fed content. Our soap-box artists had come to the point at last where they preached, not disaster, but a fullbellied thanks for the millennium that was here. A period of Utopian quietness—no villain around the corner; no man to covet the ox of his neighbor.

Those were the days of the millennium. Nothing ever happened. Here's hoping they never come again. And then:

Honestly, we were not to blame for bestowing blessing out of our hearts upon that newspaperman. Even if it were a hoax, it was at least something.

At high noon. A strange and a portentous moment. Looking back and over the miracle we may conjecture that it was the clearness of the atmosphere and the brightness of the sun that helped to the impact of the disaster. Knowing what we know now we can appreciate the impulse of natural phenomena. It was *not* a miracle.

The spot: Fourteenth and Broadway, Oakland, California.

Fortunately the thousands of employees in the stores about had not yet come out for their luncheons. The lapse that it takes to put a hat on, or to pat a curl, saved a thousand lives. One shudders to think of what would have happened had the spot been crowded. Even so, it was too impossible and too terrible to be true. Such things could not happen.

At high noon: The traffic policeman at his post had just given his signal. Two automobiles were passing and a single pedestrian, so it is said, was working his way diagonally across the corner. Of this we are not certain.

One moment life and action, an ordinary scene of existent monotony; and the next moment nothing. The spot, the intersection of the street, the two automobiles, pedestrian, the policeman—non-existent! When events are instantaneous, reports are apt to be misleading. This is what we find.

Some of those who beheld it, report a flash of bluish white light. Others that it was of a greenish or even a violet hue. And others, no doubt of stronger vision, that it was not only of a predominant color but that it was shot and sparkled with a myriad specks of flame and burning.

It gave no warning and it made no sound; not even a whir. Like a hot breath out of the void. Whatever the forces that had focused, they were destruction. In place of the intersection of the thoroughfares was a yawning gulf that looked down into the center of the earth to a depth of nausea.

It was instantaneous; it was without sound; no warning. A tremendous force of unlimited potentiality had been loosed to kinetic violence. It was the suddenness and the silence that most belied credence. We were accustomed to associate all disaster with confusion. Calamity has an affinity with pandemonium. All things of terror climax into sound. In this case there was no sound. Hence the wonder.

A hole or bore forty feet in diameter. And the spectators one and all aver that at first they took it for nothing more than the effect of startled eyesight. Almost subtle. It was not until after a full minute's reflection that they became aware that a miracle had been wrought before their faces. Then the crowd rushed up and with awe and now awakened terror gazed down into that terrible pit.

We say "terrible" because in this case it is an exact adjective. The strangest hole that man ever looked into. It was so deep that at first it appeared to have no bottom: not even the strongest eyesight could penetrate the smoldering blackness that shrouded the depths descending. It took a stout heart and courage to stand and hold one's head on the brink for even a minute.

It was straight and precipitous; a perfect

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circle in shape; with sides as smooth as the effect of machine work. The pavement and stone curb had been cut as if by a razor. Of the two automobiles and their occupants there was nothing. The whole thing so silent and complete. Not even the spectators could really believe it.

It was a hard thing to believe. The newspapers themselves, when the news came clamoring, accepted it with reluctance. It was too much like a hoax. Not until the most trusted reporters had gone and had wired in their reports would they even consider it. Then the whole world sat up and took notice.

A miracle! Like Oakland's *Press* we all of us doubted that hole. We had attained almost everything that was worth the knowing, We were the masters of the earth and its secrets and we were proud of our wisdom. Naturally we refused such reports as all out of reason. It must be a hoax.

BUT the wires were persistent. Came corroboration. A great news syndicate soon was coming through with elaborate and detailed accounts of just what was happening. We had the news from the highest and most reputable authority.

And still we doubted.

Then came the scientists. As soon as could be men of great minds had been hustled to the scene. The world had long been accustomed to accept without quibble the dictum of these great specialists of fact. With their train of accomplishments behind them we would hardly be consistent were we to doubt them.

In a few moments a crowd of many thousands had gathered about the spot; the throng grew so dense that there was peril of some of them being crowded into the pit at the center. It took all the spare policemen of the city to beat them back far enough to string ropes from the corners. For blocks the streets were packed with wondering thousands. Street traffic was impossible. It was necessary to divert the cars to a roundabout route to keep the arteries open to the suburbs.

Wild rumors spread over the city. No one knew how many passengers had been upon the street cars. The officials of the company, from the schedule, could pick the numbers of the cars and their crews; but who could tell of the occupants?

Telephones rang with tearful pleadings. When the first rumors of the horror leaked out every citizen felt the clutch of panic. It was a moment of historical psychology. Out of our books we had read of this strange phase of human nature that was wont to rise like a mad screeching thing out of disaster. We had never had it in Utopia.

It was rumbling at first and out of exaggeration; as the tale passed farther back to the waiting thousands it gained with the repetition. Grim and terrible enough in fact, it ratioed up with reiteration. Perhaps after all it was not psychology. The average impulse of the human mind does not even up so exactly. In the light of what we now know it may have been the poison that had leaked into the air; the new element that was permeating the atmosphere of the city.

AT FIRST it was spasmodic. The nearest witnesses of the disaster were the first victims. A strange malady began to spot out among those of the crowd who had been at the place of contact. This is to be noticed. A strange affliction which from the virulence and rapidity of action was quite puzzling to the doctors.

Those among the physicians who would consent to statement gave it out that it was a breaking down of tissue. Which of course it was; the new element that was radiating through the atmosphere of the city. They did not know it then.

The pity of it! The subtle, odorless pall was silently shrouding out over the city. In a short time the hospitals were full and it was necessary to call in medical aid from San Francisco. They had not even time for diagnosis. The new plague was fatal almost at conception. Happily the scientists made the discovery.

It was the pall. At the end of three

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hours it was known that a death sheet was spreading out over Oakland. We may thank our stars that it was learned so early. Had the real warning come a few hours later the death list would have been horrifying.

A new element had been discovered; or if not a new element, at least something which was tipping over all the laws of the atmospheric envelope. A new combination that was fatal. When the news and the warning went out, panic fell upon the bay shore.

But some men stuck. In the face of such terror there were those who stayed and with grimness and sacrifice hung to their posts for mankind. There are some who had said that the stuff of heroes had passed away. Let them consider the case of John Robinson.

Robinson was a telegraph operator. Until that day he was a poor unknown; not a whit better than his fellows. Now he has a name that will run in history. In face of what he knew he remained under the blanket. The last words out of Oakland—his last message:

"Whole city of Oakland in grip of strange madness. Keep out of Oakland"—following which came a haphazard personal commentary:

"I can feel it coming on myself. It is like what our ancestors must have felt when they were getting drunk—alternating desires of fighting and singing—a strange sensation, light, and ecstatic with a spasmodic twitching over the forehead. Terribly thirsty. Will stick it out if I can get enough water. Never so dry in my life."

Followed a lapse of silence. Then the last words:

"I guess we're done for. There is some poison in the atmosphere—something. It has leaked, of course, out of this thing at Fourteenth and Broadway. Dr. Manson of the American Institute says it is something new that is forming a fatal combination; but he cannot understand a new element; the quantity is too enormous.

"Populace has been warned out of the city. All the roads are packed with refugees. The Berkeley Hills are covered as with flies—north, east, and south and on the boats to Frisco. The poison, whatever it is, is advancing in a ring from Fourteenth and Broadway. You have got to pass it to these old boys of science. They are staying with that ring. Already they have calculated the rate of its advance and have given warning. They don't know just how fast it is moving. They have saved the city.

"I am one of the few men now inside the wave. Out of curiosity I have stuck. I have a jug and as long as it lasts I shall stay. Strange feeling. Dry, dry, dry, as if the juice of one's life cells was turning into dust. Water evaporating almost instantly. It cannot pass through glass. Whatever the poison it has an affinity for moisture. Do not understand it. Perhaps the scientists can explain it. I have had enough—"

That was all. After that there was no more news out of Oakland. It is the only word that we have out of the pall itself. It was short and disconnected and a bit slangy; but for all that a basis from which to conjecture.

It is a strange and glorious thing how some men will stick to the post of danger. This operator knew that it meant death; but he held with duty. Had he been a man of scientific training his information might have been of incalculable value. However, may God bless his heroic soul!

What we know is thirst! The word that came from the experts confirmed it. Some new element or force was stealing or sapping the water gas out of the atmosphere. Whether this was combining and entering into a poison could not be determined.

Chemists worked frantically at the outposts of the advancing ring. In four hours it had covered the city; in six it had reached San Leandro, and was advancing on toward Haywards.

It was a strange story and incredible from the beginning. No wonder the world doubted. Such a thing had never happened. We had accepted the law of judging the future by the past; by deduction; we

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were used to sequence and to law; to the laws of Nature. This thing did look like a miracle; which was merely because—as usually it is with "miracles"—we could not understand it. Happily, we can look back now and still place our faith in Nature.

The world doubted and was afraid. Was this peril to spread slowly over the whole state of California and thence on to the —world? Doubt always precedes terror. A tense world waited. Then came the word of reassurance from the scientists:

"Danger past; vigor of the ring is abating. Calculation has deduced that the wave is slowly decreasing in potentiality. It will not advance much further. It is too early yet to say that there will be recession; as the wave is just reaching its zenith. What it is we cannot say; but it cannot be inexplicable. After a little time it will all be explained. Say to the world there is no cause for alarm."

But did the scientists know? Could they only have seen the future? We know now that they did not. There was but one man in all the world great enough to foresee disaster. That man was Charley Huyck.

CHAPTER III

THE MOUNTAIN THAT WAS

ON THE same day on which all this happened, a young man, Pizzozi by name and of Italian parentage, left the little town of Ione in Amador County, California, with a small truck-load of salt. He was one of the cattlemen whose headquarters or home-farms are clustered about the foot-hills of the Sierras. In the wet season they stay with their home-land in the valley; in the summer they penetrate into the mountains. Pizzozi had driven in from the mountains the night before, after salt. He had been on the road since midnight.

Two thousand salt hungry cattle do not allow time for gossip. With the thrift of his race, Joe had loaded up his truck and after a running snatch at breakfast was headed back into the mountains. When the news out of Oakland was thrilling round the world he was far into the Sierras.

The summer quarters of Pizzozi were close to Mt. Heckla, whose looming shoulders rose square in the center of the pasture of the three brothers. It was not a noted mountain—that is, until this day —and had no reason for a name other than that it was a peak outstanding from the range. Like a thousand others, it was rugged, pine clad, coated with deer-brush, red soil, and mountain miserie.

It was the deer brush that gave it value to the Pizzozis—a succulent feed richer than alfalfa. In the early summer they would come up with bony cattle. When they returned in the fall they went out driving beef-steaks. But inland cattle must have more than forage. Salt is the tincture that makes them healthy.

It was far past the time of the regular salting. Pizzozi was in a hurry. It was nine oclock when he passed through the mining town of Jackson; and by twelve o'clock—the minute of the disaster—he was well beyond the last little hamlet that linked up with civilization. It was four o'clock when he drew up at the little pine-sheltered cabin that was his headquarters for the summer.

He had been on the road since midnight. He was tired. The long weary hours of driving, the grades, the unvaried stress through the deep red dust, the heat, the stretch of a night and day had worn both mind and muscle. It had been his turn to go after salt; now that he was here, he could lie in for a bit of rest while his brothers did the salting.

It was a peaceful spot this cabin of the Pizzozis; nestled among the virgin shade trees, great tall feathery sugar-pines with a mountain live-oak spreading over the door yard. To the east the rising heights of the Sierras, misty, gray-green, undulating into the distance to the pink-white snow crests of Little Alpine. Below in the cañon, the waters of the Mokolumne; to the west the heavy dark mass of Mt. Heckla, deep verdant in the cool of coming evening.

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Joe drew up under the shade of the live oak. The air was full of the cool, sweet scent of the afternoon. No moment could have been more peaceful; the blue clear sky overhead, the breath of summer, and the soothing spice of the pine trees. A shepherd dog came bounding from the doorway to meet him.

It was his favorite cow dog. Usually when Joe came back the dog would be far down the road to forestall him. He had wondered, absently, coming up, at the dog's delay. A dog is most of all a creature of habit; only something unusual would detain him. However the dog was here; as the man drew up he rushed out to greet him. A rush, a circle, a bark, and a whine of welcome. Perhaps the dog had been asleep.

But Joe noticed that whine; he was wise in the ways of dogs; when Ponto whined like that there was something unusual. It was not effusive nor spontaneous; but rather of the delight of succor. After scarce a minute of petting, the dog squatted and faced to the westward. His whine was startling; almost fearful.

Pizzozi knew that something was wrong. The dog drew up, his stub tail erect, and his hair all bristled; one look was for his master and the other whining and alert to Mt. Heckla. Puzzled, Joe gazed at the mountain. But he saw nothing.

Was it the canine instinct, or was it just coincidence? We have the account from Pizzozi. From the words of the Italian, the dog was afraid. It was not the way of Ponto; usually in the face of danger he was alert and eager; now he drew away to the cabin. Joe wondered.

Inside the shack he found nothing but evidence of departure. There was no sign of his brothers. It was his turn to go to sleep; he was wearied almost to numbness, for forty-eight hours he had not closed an eyelid. On the table were a few unwashed dishes and crumbs of eating. One of the three rifles that hung usually on the wall was missing; the coffee pot was on the floor with the lid open. On the bed the coverlets were mussed up. It was a temptation to go to sleep. Back of him the open door and Ponto. The whine of the dog drew his will and his consciousness into correlation. A faint rustle in the sugar-pines came from the cañon.

Joe watched the dog. The sun was just glowing over the crest of the mountain; on the western line the deep lacy silhouettes of the pine trees and the bare bald head of Heckla. What was it? His brothers should be on hand for the salting; it was not their custom to put off things for the morrow. Shading his eyes he stepped out of the doorway.

The dog rose stealthily and walked beside him, uneasily, with the same insistent whine and ruffled hair. Joe listened. Only the mountain murmurs, the sweet breath of the forest, and in the lapse of bated breath the rippling melody of the river far below him.

"What you see, Ponto? What you see?"

At the words the dog sniffed and advanced slightly—a growl and then a sudden scurry to the heels of his master. Ponto was afraid. It puzzled Pizzozi. But whatever it was that roused his fear, it was on Mt. Heckla.

THIS is one of the strange parts of the story—the part the dog played, and what came after. Although it is a trivial thing it is one of the most inexplicable. Did the dog sense it? We have no measure for the range of instinct, but we do have it that before the destruction of Pompeii the beasts roared in their cages. Still, knowing what we now know, it is hard to accept the analogy. It may, after all, have been coincidence.

Nevertheless it decided Pizzozi. The cattle needed salt. He would catch up his pinto and ride over to the salt logs.

There is no moment in the cattle industry quite like the salting on the range. It is not the most spectacular perhaps, but surely it is not lacking in intenseness. The way of Pizzozi was musical even if not operatic. He had a long-range call, a rising rhythm that for depth and tone had a peculiar effect on the shattered stillness.

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It echoed and reverberated, and pealed from the bottom to the top of the mountain. The salt call is the talisman of the mountains.

"Alleewahoo!"

Two thousand cattle augmented by a thousand strays held up their heads in answer. The sniff of the welcome salt call! Through the whole range of the man's voice the stock stopped in their leafy pasture, and listened.

"Alleewahoo!"

An old cow bellowed. It was the beginning of bedlam. From the bottom of the mountain to the top and for miles beyond went forth the salt call. Three thousand head bellowed to the delight of salting.

Pizzozi rode along. Each lope of his pinto through the tall tangled miserie was accented. *"Alleewahoo! Alleewahoo!"* The rending of brush, the confusion, and pandemonium spread to the very bottom of the leafy gulches. It was no place for a pedestrian. Heads and tails erect, the cattle were stampeding toward the logs.

A few head had beat him to it. These he quickly drove away and cut the sack open. With haste he poured it upon the logs; then he rose out of the dust that for yards about the place was tramped to the finest powder. The center of a herd of salting range stock is no place for comfort. The man rode away; to the left he ascended a low knob where he would be safe from the stampede; but close enough to distinguish the brands.

In no time the place was alive with milling stock. Old cows, heifers, bulls, calves, steers rushed out of the crashing brush into the clearing. There is no moment exactly like it. What before had been a broad clearing of brownish reddish dust was trampled into a vast cloud of bellowing blur, a thousand cattle, and still coming. From the farthest height came the echoing call. Pizzozi glanced up at the top of the mountain.

And then a strange thing happened.

From what we gathered from the excited accounts of Pizzozi it was instantaneous; and yet by the same words it was of such a peculiar and beautiful effect as never to be forgotten. A bluish azure shot through with a myriad flecks of crimson, a peculiar vividness of opalescence. The whole world, scintillating; the sky, the air, the mountain, a vast flame of color so wide and so intense that there seemed not a thing beside it. And instantaneous—it was over almost before it was started. No noise nor warning, and no subsequent detonation. As silent as winking and much, indeed, like the queer blur of color induced by defective vision. All in the fraction of a second. Pizzozi had been gazing at the mountain. There was no mountain!

Neither were there cattle. Where before had been the shade of the towering peak were now the rays of the western sun. Where had been the blur of the milling herd and its deafening pandemonium was now a strange silence. The transparency of the air was unbroken into the distance.

Far off lay a peaceful range in the sunset. There was no mountain! Neither were there cattle!

For a moment the man had enough to do with his plunging mustang. In the blur of the subsequent second Pizzozi remembers nothing but a convulsion of fighting horseflesh bucking, twisting, plunging, the gentle pinto suddenly maddened into a demon. It required all the skill of the cowman to retain his saddle.

He did not know that he was riding on the rim of Eternity. In his mind was the dim subconscious realization of a thing that had happened. In spite of all his efforts the horse fought backward. It was some moments before he conquered. Then he looked.

It was a slow, hesitant moment. One cannot account for what he will do in the open face of miracle. What the Italian beheld was enough for terror. The sheer immensity of the thing was too much for thinking.

At the first sight his simple mind went numb from sheer impotence; his terror to a degree frozen. The whole of Mt. Heckla had been shorn away; in the place

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of its darkened shadow the sinking sun was blinking in his face; the whole western sky all golden. There was no vestige of the flat salt clearing at the base of the mountain. Of the two thousand cattle milling in the dust not a one remained. The man crossed himself in stupor. Mechanically he put the spurs to the pinto.

But the mustang would not answer. Another struggle with bucking, fighting, maddened horseflesh. The cow-man must needs bring in all the skill of his training; but by the time he had conquered his mind had settled within some scope of comprehension.

The pony had good reasons for its terror. This time though the man's mind reeled it did not go numb at the clash of immensity. Not only had the whole mountain been torn away, but its roots as well. The whole thing was up-side down; the world torn to its entrails. In place of what had been the height was a gulf so deep that its depths were blackness.

He was standing on the brink. He was a cool man, was Pizzozi; but it was hard in the confusion of such a miracle to think clearly; much less to reason. The prancing mustang was snorting terror. The man glanced down.

The very dizziness of the gulf, sheer, losing itself into shadows and chaos, overpowered him, his mind now clear enough for perception reeled at the distance. The depth was nauseous. His whole body succumbed to a sudden qualm of weakness; the sickness that comes just before falling. He went limp in the saddle.

But the horse fought backward; warned by instinct it drew back from the sheer banks of the gulf. It had no reason but its nature. At the instant it sensed the snapping of the iron will of its master. In a moment it had turned and was racing on its wild way out of the mountains. At supreme moments a cattle horse will always hit for home. The pinto and its limp rider were fleeting on the road to Jackson.

Pizzozi had no knowledge of what had occurred in Oakland. To him the whole thing had been but a flash of miracle; he could not reason. He did not curb his horse. That he was still in the saddle was due more to the near instinct of his training than to his volition.

He did not even draw up at the cabin. That he could make better time with his motor than with his pinto did not occur to him. His mind was far too busy; and, now that the thing was past, too full of terror. It was forty-four miles to town; it was night and the stars were shining when he rode into Jackson.

CHAPTER IV

"MAN—A GREAT LITTLE BUG"

AND what of Charley Huyck? It was his anticipation, and his training which leaves us here to tell the story. Were it not for the strange manner of his rearing, and the keen faith and appreciation of Dr. Robold there would be today no tale to tell. The little incident of the burning-glass had grown. If there is no such thing as Fate there is at least something that comes very close to being Destiny.

On this night we find Charley at the observatory in Arizona. He is a grown man and a great one, and though mature, not so very far drawn from the lad we met on the street selling papers. Tall, slender, very slightly stooped and with the same idealistic, dreaming eyes of the poet. Surely no one at first glance would have taken him for a scientist. Which he was and was not.

Indeed, there is something vastly different about the science of Charley Huyck. Science to be sure, but not prosaic. He was the first and perhaps the last of the school of Dr. Robold, a peculiar combination of poetry and fact, a man of vision, of vast, far-seeing faith and idealism linked and based on the coldest and sternest truths of materialism. A peculiar tenet of the theory of Robold: "True science to be itself should be half poetry." Which any of us who have read or been at school know it is not. It is a peculiar theory and though rather wild still with some points in favor.

"The really great scientist should be a

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visionary," said Robold, "and an inventor is merely a poet, with tools."

Which is where we get Charley Huyck. He was a visionary, a scientist, a poet with tools, the protégé of Dr. Robold. He dreamed things that no scientist had thought of. And we are almighty thankful for his dreaming.

The one great friend of Huyck was Professor Williams, a man from Charlie's home city, who had known him even back in the days of selling papers. They had been cronies in boyhood, in their teens, when Huyck had become the visionary, the mysterious Man of the Mountain, and Williams a great professor of astronomy, the friendship was as strong as ever.

But there was a difference between them. Williams was exact to acuteness, with not a whit of vision beyond pure science. He had been reared in the old stone-cold theory of exactness; he lived in figures. He could not understand Huyck nor his reasoning. Perfectly willing to follow as far as facts permitted, he refused to step off into speculation.

Which was the point between them. Charley Huyck had vision; although exact as any man, he had ever one part of his mind soaring out into speculation. What is, and what might be, and the gulf between. To bridge the gulf was the life work of Charley Huyck.

In the snug little office in Arizona we find them; Charley with his feet poised on the desk and Williams precise and punctilious, true to his training, defending the exactness of his philosophy. It was the cool of the evening; the sun had just set and the softness of the night was just mellowing the heat of the desert. Through the open door and windows a cool wind was blowing. Charley was smoking; the same old pipe that had been the bane of William's life at college.

"Then we know?" he was asking.

"Yes," spoke the professor, "what we know, Charley, we know; though of course it is not much. It is very hard, nay impossible, to deny figures. We have not only the proofs of geology but of astronomical calculation, we have facts and figures plus our sidereal relations all about us.

"The world must come to an end. It is a hard thing to say it, but it is a fact of science. Slowly, inevitably, ruthlessly, the end will come. A mere question of arithmetic."

Huyck nodded. It was his special function in life to differ with his former roommate. He had come down from his own mountain in Colorado just for the delight of the difference.

"I see. Your old calculation of tidal retardation. Or if that doesn't work the loss of oxygen and the water."

"Either one or the other; a matter of figures, the earth is being drawn every day by the sun; its rotation is slowing up; when the time comes it will act to the sun in exactly the same manner as the moon acts to the earth today."

"I understand. It will be a case of eternal night for one side of the earth, and eternal day for the other. A case of burn up or freeze up."

"Exactly. Or if it doesn't reach to that, the water gas will gradually lose out into sidereal space and we will go to desert. Merely a question of the old dynamical theory of gases; of the molecules to be in motion, to be forever colliding and shooting out into variance.

"Each minute, each hour, each day we are losing part of our atmospheric envelope. In course of time it will all be gone; when it is we shall be all desert. For instance, take a look outside. This is Arizona. Once it was the bottom of a deep blue sea. Why deny when we can already behold the beginning?"

The other laughed.

"Pretty good mathematics at that, professor. Only—"

"Only?"

"That is merely mathematics."

"MERELY mathematics?" The professor frowned slightly. "Mathematics do not lie, Charlie, you cannot get away from them. What sort of fanciful argument are you bringing up now?"

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"Simply this," returned the other, "that you depend too much on figures. They are material and in the nature of things can only be employed in a calculation of what *may* happen in the future. You must have premises to stand on, facts. Your figures are rigid; they have no elasticity; unless your foundations are permanent and faultless your deductions will lead you only into error."

"Granted; just the point; we know where we stand. Wherein are we in error?"

It was the old point of difference. Huyck was ever crashing down the idols of pure materialism. Williams was of the world-wide school.

"You are in error, my dear professor, in a very little thing and a very large one."

"What is this?"

"Man."

"Man?"

"Yes. He's a great little bug. You have left him out of your calculation—which he will upset."

The professor smiled indulgently. "I'll allow; he is at least a conceited bug; but you surely cannot grant him much when pitted against the Universe."

"No? Did it ever occur to you, professor, what the Universe is? The stars for instance? Space, the unmeasurable distance of Infinity. Have you never dreamed?"

Williams could not quite grasp him. Huyck had a habit that had grown out of childhood. Always he would allow his opponent to commit himself. The professor did not answer. But the other spoke:

"Ether. You know it. Whether mind or granite. For instance, your desert." He placed his finger to his forehead. "Your mind, my mind—localized ether."

"What are you driving at?"

"Merely this. Your universe has intelligence. It has mind as well as matter. The little knot called the earth is becoming conscious. Your deductions are incompetent unless they embrace mind as well as matter, and they cannot do it. Your mathematics are worthless."

The professor bit his lip.

"Always fanciful," he commented, "and visionary. Your argument is beautiful, Charley, and hopeful. I would that it were true. But all things must mature. Even an earth must die."

"Not our earth. You look into the past, professor, for your proof, and I look into the future. Give a planet long enough time in maturing and it will develop life: give it still longer and it will produce intelligence. Our own earth is just coming into consciousness: it has thirty million years, at least, to run."

"You mean?"

"This. That man is a great little bug. Mind: the intelligence of the earth."

This of course is a bit dry. The conversation of such men very often is to those who do not care to follow them. But it is very pertinent to what came after. We know now, every one knows, that Charley Huyck was right. Even professor Williams admits it. Our earth is conscious. In less than twenty-four hours it was necessary to employ its consciousness to save itself from destruction.

A bell rang. It was the private wire that connected the office with the residence. The professor picked up the receiver. "Just a minute. Yes? All right." Then to his companion: "I must go over to the house, Charley. We have plenty of time. Then we can go up to the observatory."

Which shows how little we know about ourselves. Poor Professor Williams! Little did he think that those casual words were the last he would ever speak to Charley Huyck.

The whole world seething! The beginning of the end! Charley Huyck in the vortex. The next few hours were to be the most strenuous of the planet's history.

CHAPTER V

APPROACHING DISASTER

IT WAS night. The stars which had just been coming out were spotted by millions over the sleeping desert. One of the nights that are peculiar to the country,

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which we all of us know so well, if not from experience, at least from hearsay; mellow, soft, sprinkled like salted fire, twinkling.

Each little light a message out of infinity. Cosmic grandeur; mind; chaos, eternity—a night for dreaming. Whoever had chosen the spot in the desert had picked full well. Charley had spoken of consciousness. On that night when he gazed up at the stars he was its personification. Surely a good spirit was watching over the earth.

A cool wind was blowing; on its breath floated the murmurs from the village; laughter, the song of children, the purring of motors and the startled barking of a dog; the confused drone of man and his civilization. From the eminence the observatory looked down upon the town and the sheen of light, spotting like jewels in the dim gloom of the desert. To the east the mellow moon just tipping over the mountain. Charley stepped to the window.

He could see it all. The subtle beauty that was so akin to poetry; the stretch of the desert, the mountains, the light in the eastern sky; the dull level shadow that marked the plain to the northward. To the west the mountains looming black to the star line. A beautiful night; sweetened with the breath of desert and tuned to its slumber.

Across the lawn he watched the professor descending the pathway under the acacias. An automobile was coming up the driveway; as it drove up under the arcs he noticed its powerful lines and its driver; the soft purr of its motor; its coating of dust. There is a lure about a great car coming in from the desert. The car stopped, Charley noted. Doubtless someone for Williams. If it were, he would go into the observatory alone.

In the strict sense of the word Huyck was not an astronomer. He had not made it his profession. But for all that he knew things about the stars that the more exact professors had not dreamed of. Between him and the stars lay a secret.

He crossed the office, passed through the reception-room and thence to the stairs that led to the observatory. In the time that would lapse before the coming of his friend he would have ample time for his observation. Somehow he felt that there was time for discovery. He had come down to Arizona to employ the lens of his friend the astronomer. The instrument that he had erected on his own mountain in Colorado had not given him the full satisfaction that he expected. Here in Arizona, in the dry clear air, which had hitherto given such splendid results, he hoped to find what he was after. But little did he expect to discover the terrible thing he did.

It is one of the strange parts of the story—that he should be here at the very moment when Fate and the world's safety would have had him.

The boy and the burning glass had grown under the tutelage of Dr. Robold: the time was about at hand when he could out-rival the saying of Archimedes. Though the world knew it not, Charley Huyck had arrived at the point where he could literally burn up the earth.

But he was not sinister: though he had the power he had of course not the slightest intention. He was a dreamer and it was part of his dream that man break his thraldom to the earth and reach out into the universe. It was a great conception and were it not for the terrible event which took his life we have no doubt but what he would have succeeded.

It was ten thirty when he mounted the steps and seated himself. He glanced at his watch: he had a good ten minutes. He had computed before just the time for the observation. For months he had waited for just this moment; he had not hoped to be alone and now that he was in solitary possession he counted himself fortunate. Only the stars and Charley Huyck knew the secret; and not even he dreamed what it would amount to.

From his pocket he drew a number of papers; most of them covered with notations; some with drawings; and a good sized map in colors. This he spread before

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him, and with his pencil began to draw right across its face a net of lines and cross lines. A number of figures and a rapid computation. He nodded and then he made the observation.

IT WOULD have been interesting to study the face of Charley Huyck during the next few moments. At first he was merely receptive, his face placid but with the studious intentness of one who has come to the moment; and as he began to find what he was after an eagerness of satisfaction. Then a queer blankness; the slight movement of his body stopped, and the tapping of his feet ceased entirely.

For a full five minutes an absolute intentness. During that time he was out among the stars beholding what not even he had dreamed of. It was more than a secret; and what it was only Charley Huyck of all the millions of men could have recognized. Yet it was more than even he had expected. When he at last drew away his face was chalklike; great drops of sweat stood on his forehead; and the terrible truth in his eyes made him look ten years older.

"My God!"

For a moment indecision and strange impotence. The truth he had beheld numbed action; from his lips the mumbled words.

"This world; my world; our great and splendid mankind!"

A sentence that was despair and a benediction.

Then mechanically he turned back to confirm his observation. This time, knowing what he would see, he was not so horrified; his mind was cleared by the plain fact of what he was beholding.

When at last he drew away his face was settled.

He had been dreaming all his life. He had never thought that the climax was to be the very opposite of what he hoped for. In his under mind he prayed for Dr. Ro-

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bold—dead and gone forever. Were he only here to help him!

He seized a piece of paper. Over its white face he ran a mass of computations. He worked like lightning; his fingers plying and his mind keyed to the pin-point of genius. Not one thing did he overlook in his calculation. If the earth had a chance he would find it.

There are always possibilities. He was working out the odds of the greatest race since creation. While the whole world slept, while the uncounted millions lay down in fond security, Charley Huyck there in the lonely room on the desert drew out their figured odds to the point of infinity.

"Just one chance in a million."

He was going to take it. The words were not out of his mouth before his long legs were leaping down the stairway. In the flash of seconds his mind was rushing into clear action. He had had years of dreaming; all his years of study and tutelage under Robold gave him just the training for such a disaster.

But he needed time. Time! Time! Why was it so precious! He must get to his own mountain. In six jumps he was in the office.

It was empty. The professor had not returned. He thought rather grimly and fleetingly of their conversation a few minutes before; what would Williams think now of science and consciousness? He picked up the telephone. While he waited he saw out of the corner of his eye the car in the driveway. It was—

"Hello. The professor? What? Gone down to the town? No! Well, say, this is Charley"—he was watching the car in front of the building. "Say, hello—tell him I have gone home, home! H-o-m-e to Colorado—to Colorado, yes—to the mountain—the m-o-u-n-t-a-i-n. Oh, never mind—I'll leave a note."

He clamped down the receiver. On the desk he scrawled rapidly on a piece of paper:

> Ed: Look these up. I'm bound for the mountain. No time to explain. There's a car outside. Stay with the lens. Don't leave it. If the earth goes up you will know that I have not reached the mountain.

Beside the note he placed one of the maps that he had in his pocket; with his pencil drew a black cross just above the center. Under the map were a number of computations.

It is interesting to note that in the stress of the great critical moment he forgot the professor's title. It was a good thing. When Williams read it he recognized the significance. All through their life in crucial moments he had been "Ed" to Charley.

But the note was all he was destined to find. A brisk wind was blowing. By a strange balance of fate the same movement that let Huyck out of the building ushered in the wind to upset calculation.

It was a little thing; but it was enough to keep all the world in ignorance and despair. The eddy whisking in through the door picked up the precious map, poised it like a tiny plane, and dropped it neatly behind a bookcase.

CHAPTER VI

A RACE TO SAVE THE WORLD

HUYCK was working in a straight line. Almost before his last words on the phone were spoken he had requisitioned that automobile outside; whether money or talk, faith or force, he was going to have it. The hum of the motor sounded in his ears as he ran down the steps. He was hatless and in his shirt-sleeves. The driver was just putting some tools in the car. With one jump Charley had him by the collar.

"Five thousand dollars if you can get me to Robold Mountain within twenty hours."

The very suddenness of the rush caught the man by surprise and lurched him against the car, turning him half around. Charley found himself gazing into dull brown eyes and sardonic laughter; a long, thin nose and lips drooped at the corners, then as suddenly tipping up—a queer creature, half devil, half laughter, and all fun.

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"Easy, Charley, easy! How much did you say? Whisper it."

It was Bob Winters. Bob Winters and his car. And waiting. Surely no twist of fortune could have been greater. He was a college chum of Huyck's and of the professor's. If there was one man that could make the run in the time allotted, Bob was he. But Huyck was impersonal. With the burden on his mind he thought of naught but his destination.

"Ten thousand!" he shouted.

The man held back his head. Huyck was far too serious to appreciate mischief. But not the man.

"Charley Huyck, of all men. Did young Lochinvar come out of the West? How much did you say? This desert air and the dust, 'tis hard on the hearing. She must be a young, fair maiden. Ten thousand."

"Twenty thousand. Thirty thousand. Damnation, man, you can have the mountain. Into the car."

By sheer subjective strength he forced the other into the machine. It was not until they were shooting out of the grounds on two wheels that he realized that the man was Bob Winters. Still the workings of fate.

The madcap and wild Bob of the races! Surely destiny was on the job. The challenge of speed and the premium. At the opportune moment before disaster the two men were brought together. Minutes weighed up with centuries and hours outbalanced millenniums. The whole world slept; little did it dream that its very life was riding north with these two men into the midnight.

Winters wondered. Through miles and miles of fleeting sagebrush, cacti and sand and desolation, he rolled over the problem. Steady as a rock, slightly stooped, grim and as certain as steel he held to the north. Charley Huyck by his side, hatless, coatless, his hair dancing to the wind, all impatience. Why was it?

The whole thing spelled speed to Bob Winters: perhaps it was the infusion of spirit or the intensity of his companion; but the thrill ran into his vitals. Thirty thousand dollars—for a stake like that—what was the balance? He had been called Wild Bob for his daring; some had called him insane. On this night his insanity was enchantment.

It was wild; the lee of the giant roadster a whirring seethe of gravel: into the darkness, into the night the car fought over the distance.

They were moving; slowly, minute by minute, they were cutting down the odds that bore disaster. In his mind was a maze of figures; the terrible sight he had seen in the telescope and the thing impending. Why had he kept his secret?

Over and again he impeached himself and Dr. Robold. It had come to this. The whole world sleeping and only himself to save it. Oh, for a few minutes, for one short moment! Would he get it?

At last they reached the mountains. A rough, rocky road, and but little traveled. Happily Winters had made it once before, and knew it. He took it with every bit of speed they could stand, but even at that it was diminished to a minimum.

FOR hours they fought over grades and gulches, dry washouts and growing pink when they rode down again onto the level. It was here that they ran across their first trouble; and it was here that Winters began to realize vaguely what a race they might be running.

The particular level which they had entered was an elbow of the desert projecting into the mountains just below a massive, newly constructed dam. It was a great new project of reclamation. The reservoir had but lately been filled, and all was being put in readiness for the dedication.

An immense sheet of water extending far back into the mountains which was intended before long to transform the desert into roses. Below, in the valley, was a town, already the center of a prosperous irrigation settlement; but soon, with the added area, to become a flourishing city. The elbow, where they struck it, was per-

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haps twenty miles across. Their northward path would take them just outside the tip where the foothills of the opposite mountain chain melted into the desert. Without ado Winters put on all speed and plunged across the sands. And then:

It was much like winking; but for all that something far more impressive. To Winters, on the left hand of the car and with the east on the right hand, it was much as if the sun had suddenly leaped up and as suddenly plumped down behind the horizon—a vast vividness of scintillating opalescence: an azure, flaming diamond shot by a billion fire points.

Instantaneous and beautiful. In the pale dawn of the desert air its wonder and color were beyond all beauty. Winters caught it out of the corner of his eye; it was so instantaneous and so illusive that he was not certain. Instinctively he looked to his companion.

But Charley, too, had seen it. His attitude of waiting and hoping was vigorized into vivid action. He knew just what it was. With one hand he clutched Winters and fairly shouted.

"On, on, Bob! On, as you value your life. Put her into every bit of speed you have got."

At the same instant, at the same breath came a roar that was not to be forgotten; crunching, rolling, terrible—like the mountain moving.

Bob knew it. It was the dam. Something had broken it. To the east the great wall of water falling out of the mountains! A beautiful sight and terrible; relentless glassy roller fringed along its base by a lace of racing foam. The upper part was as smooth as crystal; the stored-up waters of the mountains moving out compactly. The man thought of the little town below and its peril. But Huyck thought also. He shouted in Winter's ear:

"Never mind the town. Keep straight north. Over yonder to the point of the water. The town will have to drown."

It was inexorable; there was no pity; the very strength and purpose of the command drove into the other's understanding. Dimly now he realized that they were really running a race against time. Winters was a daredevil; the very catastrophe sent a thrill of exultation through him. It was the climax, the great moment of his life, to be driving at a hundred miles an hour under that wall of water.

The roar was terrible. Before they were half across it seemed to the two men that the very sound would drown them. There was nothing in the world but pandemonium. The strange flash was forgotten in the terror of the living wall that was reaching out to engulf them. Like insects they whizzed in the open face of the deluge. When they had reached the tip they were so close that the out-running fringe of the surf was at their wheels.

Around the point, with the wide open plain before them. With the flood behind them it was nothing to outrun it. The waters with a wider stretch spread out. In a few moments they had left it behind them.

But Winters wondered; what was the strange flash of evanescent beauty? He knew this dam and its construction; to outlast the centuries. It had been whiffed in a second. It was not lightning. He had heard no sound other than the rush of the waters. He looked to his companion.

Huyck nodded.

"That's the thing we are racing. We have only a few hours. Can we make it?"

Bob had thought that he was getting all the speed possible out of his motor. What it yielded from that moment on was a revelation.

It is not safe nor hardly possible to be driving at such speed on the desert. Only the best car and a firm roadway can stand it. A sudden rut, squirrel hole, or pocket of sand is as good as destruction. They rushed on till noon.

Not even Winters, with all his alertness, could avoid it. Perhaps he was weary. The tedious hours, the racking speed had worn to exhaustion. They had ceased to individualize, their way a blur, a nightmare of speed and distance.

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It came suddenly, a blind barranca—one of those sunken, useless channels that are death to the unwary. No warning.

It was over just that quickly. A mere flash of consciousness plus a sensation of flying. Two men broken on the sands and the great, beautiful car a twisted ruin.

CHAPTER VII

A RIVEN CONTINENT

BUT back to the world. No one knew about Charley Huyck nor what was occurring on the desert. Even if we had it would have been impossible to construe connection.

After the news out of Oakland, and the destruction of Mt. Heckla, we were far too appalled. The whole thing was beyond us. Not even the scientists with all their data could find one thing to work on. The wires of the world buzzed with wonder and with panic. We were civilized. It is really strange how quickly, in spite of our boasted powers, we revert to the primitive.

Superstition cannot die. Where was no explanation must be miracle. The thing had been repeated. When would it strike again. And where?

There was not long to wait. But this time the stroke was of far more consequence and of far more terror. The sheer might of the thing shook the earth. Not a man nor government but what resigned in the face of such destruction.

It was omnipotent. A whole continent had been riven. It would be impossible to give description of such catastrophe; no pen can tell it any more than it could describe the creation. We can only follow in its path.

On the morning after the first catastrophe, at eight o'clock just south of the little city of Santa Cruz, on the north shore of the Bay of Monterey. The same light and the same, though not quite the same, instantaneousness. Those who beheld it report a vast ball of azure blue and opalescent fire and motion; a strange sensation of vitalized vibration; of personified living force. In shape like a marble, as round as a full moon, in its glory, but of infinitely more beauty.

It came from nowhere; neither from above the earth nor below it. Seeming to leap out of nothing, it glided or rather vanished to the eastward. Still the effect of winking, though this time, perhaps from a distanced focus, more vivid. A dot of marble, like a full moon, burning, opal, searing to the eastward.

And instantaneous. Gone as soon as it came; noiseless and of fantom beauty; like a finger of the Omnipotent tracing across the world, and as terrible. The human mind had never conceived a thing so vast.

Beginning at the sands of the ocean the whole country had vanished; a chasm twelve miles wide and of unknown depth running straight to the eastward. Where had been farms and homes was nothing; the mountains had been seared like butter. Straight as an arrow.

Then the roar of the deluge. The waters of the Pacific breaking through its sands and rolling into the Gulf of Mexico. That there was no heat was evidenced by the fact that there was no steam. The thing could not be internal. Yet what was it?

One can only conceive in figures. From the shores of Santa Cruz to the Atlantic—a few seconds; then out into the eastern ocean straight out into the Sea of the Sargasso. A great gulf riven straight across the face of North America.

The path seemed to follow the sun; it bore to the eastward with a slight southern deviation. The mountains it cut like cheese. Passing just north of Fresno it seared through the gigantic Sierras halfway between the Yosemite and Mt. Whitney, through the Pannamints to southern Nevada, thence across northern Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, entering the Atlantic at a point half-way between Brunswick and Jacksonville. A great canal twelve miles in width linking the oceans. A cataclysmic blessing. Today, with thousands of ships bearing freight over its water,

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we can bless that part of the disaster.

But there was more to come. So far the miracle had been sporadic. Whatever had been its force it had been fatal only on point and occasion. In a way it had been local. The deadly atmospheric combination of its aftermath was invariable in its recession. There was no suffering. The death that it dealt was the death of obliteration. But now it entered on another stage.

The world is one vast ball, and, though large, still a very small place to live in. There are few of us, perhaps, who look upon it, or even stop to think of it, as a living being. Yet it is just that. It has its currents, life, pulse, and its fevers; it is coordinate; a million things such as the great streams of the ocean, the swirls of the atmosphere, make it a place to live in. And we are conscious only, or mostly, through disaster.

A strange thing happened.

The great opal like a mountain of fire had riven across the continent. From the beginning and with each succession the thing was magnified. But it was not until it had struck the waters of the Atlantic that we became aware of its full potency and its fatality.

The earth quivered at the shock, and man stood on his toes in terror. In twenty-four hours our civilization was literally falling to pieces. We were powerful with the forces that we understood; but against this that had been literally ripped from the unknown we were insignificant. The whole world was frozen. Let us see.

Into the Atlantic! The transition. Hitherto silence. But now the roar of ten thousand million Niagaras, the waters of the ocean rolling, catapulting, roaring into the gulf that had been seared in its bosom. The Gulf stream cut in two, the currents that tempered our civilization sheared in a second. Straight into the Sargasso Sea. The great opal, liquid fire, luminescent, a ball like the setting sun, lay poised upon the ocean. It was the end of the earth!

What was this thing? The whole world knew of it in a second. And not a one could tell. In less than forty hours after its first appearance in Oakland it had consumed a mountain, riven a continent, and was drinking up an ocean. The tangled sea of the Sargasso, dead calm for ages, was a cataract; a swirling torrent of maddened waters rushed to the opal—and disappeared.

It was hellish and out of madness; as beautiful as it was uncanny. The opal high as the Himalayas brooding upon the water; its myriad colors blending winking in a fantasm of iridescence. The beauty of its light could be seen a thousand miles. A thing out of mystery and out of forces. We had discovered many things and knew much; but had guessed no such thing as this. It was vampirish, and it was literally drinking up the earth.

Consequences were immediate. The point of contact was fifty miles across, the waters of the Atlantic with one accord turned to the magnet. The Gulf stream veered straight from its course and out across the Atlantic. The icy currents from the poles freed from the warmer barrier descended along the coasts and thence out into the Sargasso Sea. The temperature of the temperate zone tipped below the point of a blizzard.

The first word came out of London. Freezing! And in July! The fruit and entire harvest of northern Europe destroyed by snow. The river Seine frozen. Snow falling in New York. Crops nipped with frost as far south as Cape Hatteras.

A fleet of airplanes was despatched from the United States and another from the west coast of Africa. Not half of them returned. Those who did reported even more disaster. The reports that were handed in were appalling. They had sailed straight on. It was like flying into the sun; the vividness of the opalescence was blinding, rising for miles above them a sheen and a flame of living force. It was luring, drawing and unholy, and of a beauty that was terror.

Only the tardy had escaped. It even drew their motors, it was like gravity suddenly become vitalized and conscious.

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Thousands of machines vaulted into the opalescence. From those ahead hopelessly drawn and powerless came back the warning. But hundreds could not escape.

"Back," came the wireless. "Do not come too close. The thing is a magnet. Turn back before too late. Against this man is insignificant."

Then like gnats flitting into fire they vanished into the opalescence.

The others turned back. The whole world freezing shuddered in horror. A great vampire was brooding over the earth. The greatness that man had attained to was nothing. Civilization was tottering in a day. We were hopeless.

Then came the last revelation; the truth and verity of the disaster and the threatened climax. The water level of all the coast had gone down. Vast ebb tides had gone out not to return. Stretches of sand where had been surf extended far out into the sea. Then the truth! The thing was drinking up the ocean.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MAN WHO SAVED THE EARTH

IT WAS tragic; grim, terrible, cosmic. Out of nowhere had come this thing that was eating up the earth. Not a thing out of all our science had there been to warn us; not a word from all our wise men. We who had built up our civilization, piece by piece, were after all but insects.

We were going out in a maze of beauty into the infinity whence we came. Hour by hour the great orb of opalescence grew in splendor; the effect and the beauty of its lure spread about the earth; thrilling, vibrant, like suppressed music. The old earth helpless. Was it possible that out of her bosom she could not pluck one intelligence to save her? Was there not one law—no answer?

Out on the desert with his face to the sun lay the answer. Though almost hopeless there was still some time and enough of near miracle to save us. A limping fate in the shape of two Indians and a battered old car at the last moment.

Little did the two red men know the value of the two men found that day on the desert. To them the débris of the mighty car and the prone bodies told enough of the story. They were Samaritans; but there are many ages to bless them.

As it was there were many hours lost. Without it there would have been thousands of lives spared and an almost immeasurable amount of disaster. But we have still to be thankful. Charley Huyck was still living.

He had been stunned; battered, bruised, and unconscious; but he had not been injured vitally. There was still enough left of him to drag himself to the old car and call for Winters. His companion, as it happened, was in even better shape than himself, and waiting. We do not know how they talked the red men out of their relic—whether by coaxing, by threat, or by force.

Straight north. Two men battered, worn, bruised, but steadfast, bearing in that limping old motor-car the destiny of the earth. Fate was still on the job, but badly crippled.

They had lost many precious hours. Winters had forfeited his right to the thirty thousand. He did not care. He understood vaguely that there was a stake over and above all money. Huyck said nothing; he was too maimed and too much under will-power to think of speaking. What had occurred during the many hours of their unconsciousness was unknown to them. It was not until they came sheer upon the gulf that had been riven straight across the continent that the awful truth dawned on them.

To Winters it was terrible. The mere glimpse of that blackened chasm was terror. It was bottomless; so deep that its depths were cloudy; the misty haze of its uncertain shadows was akin to chaos. He understood vaguely that it was related to that terrible thing they had beheld in the morning. It was not the power of man. Some force had been loosened which was ripping the earth to its vitals. Across the

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terror of the chasm he made out the dim outlines of the opposite wall. A full twelve miles across.

For a moment the sight overcame even Huyck himself. Full well he knew; but knowing, as he did, the full fact of the miracle was even more than he expected. His long years under Robold, his scientific imagination had given him comprehension. Not puny steam, nor weird electricity, but force, kinetics—out of the universe.

He knew. But knowing as he did, he was overcome by the horror. Such a thing turned loose upon the earth! He had lost many hours; he had but a few hours remaining. The thought gave him sudden energy. He seized Winters by the arm.

"To the first town, Bob. To the first town—a landing field."

There was speed in that motor for all its decades. Winters turned about and shot out in a lateral course parallel to the great chasm. But for all his speed he could not keep back his question.

"In the name of Heaven, Charley, what did it? What is it?"

Came the answer; and it drove the lust of all speed through Winters:

"Bob," said Charley, "it is the end of the world—if we don't make it. But a few hours left. We must have an airplane. I must make the mountain."

It was enough for Wild Bob. He settled down. It was only an old wreck; but he could get speed out of a wheelbarrow. He had never driven a race like this. Just once did he speak. The words were characteristic.

"A world's record, Charley. And we're going to win. Just watch us."

And they did.

THERE was no time lost in the change. The mere fact of Huyck's name, his appearance and the manner of his arrival was enough. For the last hours messages had been pouring in at every post in the Rocky Mountains for Charley Huyck. After the failure of all others many thousands had thought of him.

Even the government, unappreciative before, had awakened to a belated and almost frantic eagerness. Orders were out that everything, no matter what, was to be at his disposal. He had been regarded as visionary; but in the face of what had occurred, visions were now the most practical things for mankind. Besides, Professor Williams had sent out to the world the strange portent of Huyck's note. For years there had been mystery on that mountain. Could it be?

Unfortunately we cannot give it the description we would like to give. Few men outside of the regular employees have ever been to the Mountain of Robold. From the very first, owing perhaps to the great forces stored, and the danger of carelessness, strangers and visitors had been barred. Then, too, the secrecy of Dr. Robold—and the respect of his successor. But we know that the burning glass had grown into the mountain.

Bob Winters and the aviator are the only ones to tell us; the employees, one and all, chose to remain. The cataclysm that followed destroyed the work of Huyck and Robold—but not until it had served the greatest deed that ever came out of the minds of men. And had it not been for Huyck's insistence we would not have even the account that we are giving.

It was he who insisted, nay, begged that his companions return while there was yet a chance. Full well he knew. Out of the universe, out of space he had coaxed the forces that would burn up the earth. The great ball of luminous opalescence, and the diminishing ocean!

There was but one answer. Through the imaginative genius of Robold and Huyck, fate had worked up to the moment. The lad and the burning glass had grown to Archimedes.

What happened?

The plane neared the Mountain of Robold. The great bald summit and the four enormous globes of crystal. At least we so assume. We have Winter's word and that of the aviator that they were of the appearance of glass. Perhaps they were not; but we can assume it for description. So

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enormous, that were they set upon a plain they would have overtopped the highest building ever constructed. Though on the height of the mountain, and in its contrast, they were not much more than golf balls.

It was not their size but their effect that was startling. They were alive. At least that is what we have from Winters. Living, luminous, burning, twisting within with a thousand blending, iridescent beautiful colors. Not like electricity but something infinitely more powerful. Great mysterious magnets that Huyck had charged out of chaos. Glowing with the softest light; the whole mountain brightened as in a dream, and the town of Robold at its base lit up with a beauty that was past beholding.

It was new to Winters. The great buildings and the enormous machinery. Engines of strangest pattern, driven by forces that the rest of the world had not thought of. Not a sound; the whole works a complicated mass covering a hundred acres, driving with a silence that was magic. Not a whir nor friction. Like a living composite body pulsing and breathing the strange and mysterious force that had been evolved from Huyck's theory of kinetics. The four great steel conduits running from the globes down the side of the mountain. In the center, at a point midway between the globes, a massive steel needle hung on a pivot and pointed directly at the sun.

Winters and the aviator noted it and wondered. From the lower end of the needle was pouring a luminous stream of pale-blue opalescence, a stream much like a liquid, and of an unholy radiance. But it was not a liquid, nor fire, nor anything seen by man before.

It was force. We have no better description than the apt phrase of Winters. Charley Huyck was milking the sun. As it dropped from the end of the needle it separated and flashed in four living streams to the four globes that took it into storage. The four great, wonderful living globes; the four batteries; the very sight of their imprisoned beauty and power was magnetic.

The genius of Huyck and Robold! Nobody but the wildest dreamers would have conceived it. The life of the sun. And captive to man; at his will and volition. And in the next few minutes we were to lose it all! But in losing it we were to save ourselves. It was fate and nothing else.

There was but one more thing upon the mountain—the observatory and another needle apparently idle; but with a point much like a gigantic phonograph needle. It rose square out of the observatory, and to Winters it gave an impression of a strange gun, or some implement for sighting.

That was all. Coming with the speed that they were making, the airmen had no time for further investigation. But even this is comprehensive. Minus the force. If we only knew more about that or even its theory we might perhaps reconstruct the work of Huyck and Robold.

They made the landing. Winters, with his nature, would be in at the finish; but Charley would not have it.

"It is death, Bob," he said. "You have a wife and babies. Go back to the world. Go back with all the speed you can get out of your motors. Get as far away as you can before the end comes."

With that he bade them a sad farewell. It was the last spoken word that the outside world had from Charley Huyck.

The last seen of him he was running up the steps of his office. As they soared away and looked back they could see men, the employees, scurrying about in frantic haste to their respective posts and stations. What was it all about? Little did the two aviators know. Little did they dream that it was the deciding stroke.

CHAPTER IX

THE MOST TERRIFIC MOMENT IN HISTORY

STILL the great ball of opalescence brooding over the Sargasso. Europe now was frozen, and though it was midsummer had gone into winter quarters.

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The Straits of Dover were no more. The waters had receded and one could walk, f careful, dry-shod from the shores of France to the chalk cliffs of England. The Strait of Gibraltar had dried up. The Mediterranean completely land-locked, was cut off from the tides of the mother ocean.

The whole world going dry; not in ethics, but in reality. The great Vampire; luminous, beautiful beyond all ken and thinking, drinking up our life-blood. The Atlantic a vast whirlpool.

A strange frenzy had fallen over mankind: men fought in the streets and died in madness. It was fear of the Great Unknown, and hysteria. At such a moment the veil of civilization was torn to tatters. Man was reverting to the primeval.

Then came the word from Charley Huyck; flashing and repeating to every clime and nation. In its assurance it was almost as miraculous as the Vampire itself. For man had surrendered.

TO THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD:

The strange and terrible Opalescence which, for the past seventy hours, has been playing havoc with the world, is not miracle nor of the supernatural, but a mere manifestation and result of the application of celestial kinetics. Such a thing always was and always will be possible where there is intelligence to control and harness the forces that lie about us. Space is not space exactly, but an infinite cistern of unknown laws and forces. We may control certain laws on earth, but until we reach out farther we are but playthings.

Man is the intelligence of the earth. The time will come when he must be the intelligence of a great deal of space as well. At the present time you are merely fortunate and a victim of a kind fate. That I am the instrument of the earth's salvation is merely chance. The real man is Dr. Robold. When he picked me up on the streets I had no idea that the sequence of time would drift to this moment. He took me into his work and taught me.

Because he was sensitive and was laughed at, we worked in secret. And since his death, and out of respect to his memory, I have continued in the same manner. But I have written down everything, all the laws, computations, formulas—everything; and I am now willing it to mankind.

Robold had a theory on kinetics. It was strange at first and a thing to laugh at; but he reduced it to laws as potent and as inexorable as the laws of gravitation.

The luminous Opalescence that has almost destroyed us is but one of its minor manifestations. It is a message of sinister intelligence; for back of it all is an Intelligence. Yet it is not all sinister. It is self-preservation. The time is coming when eons of ages from now our own man will be forced to employ just such a weapon for his own preservation. Either that or we shall die of thirst and agony.

Let me ask you to remember now, that whatever you have suffered, you have saved a world. I shall now save you and the earth.

In the vaults you will find everything. All the knowledge and discoveries of the great Dr. Robold, plus a few minor findings by myself.

And now I bid you farewell. You shall soon be free.

CHARLEY HUYCK.

A strange message. Spoken over the air and flashed out to every clime, it roused and revived the hope of mankind. Who was this Charley Huyck? Uncounted millions of men had never heard his name; there were but few, very few who had.

A message out of nowhere and of very dubious and doubtful explanation. Celestial kinetics! Undoubtedly. But the words explained nothing. However, man was ready to accept anything, so long as it saved him.

For a more lucid explanation we must go back to the Arizona observatory and Professor Ed Williams. And a strange one it was truly; a certain proof that consciousness is more potent, far more so than mere material; also that many laws of our astronomers are very apt to be overturned in spite of their mathematics.

Charley Huyck was right. You cannot measure intelligence with a yard-stick. Mathematics do not lie; but when applied to consciousness they are very likely to kick backward. That is precisely what had happened.

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The suddenness of Huyck's departure had puzzled Professor Williams; that, and the note which he found upon the table. It was not like Charley to go off so in the stress of a moment. He had not even taken the time to get his hat and coat. Surely something was amiss.

He read the note carefully, and with a deal of wonder.

"Look these up. Keep by the lens. If the world goes up you will know that I have not reached the mountain."

What did he mean? Besides, there was no data for him to work on. He did not know that an errant breeze had plumped the information behind the bookcase. Nevertheless he went into the observatory, and for the balance of the night stuck by the lens.

Now there are uncounted millions of stars in the sky. Williams had nothing to go by. A needle in the hay-stack were an easy task compared with the one that he was allotted. The flaming mystery, whatever it was that Huyck had seen, was not caught by the professor. Still, he wondered. "If the world goes up you will know I have not reached the mountain." What was the meaning?

But he was not worried. The professor loved Huyck as a visionary and smiled not a little at his delightful fancies. Doubtless this was one of them. It was not until the news came flashing out of Oakland that he began to take it seriously. Then followed the disappearance of Mount Heckla. "If the world goes up"—it began to look as if the words had meaning.

THERE was a frantic professor during the next few days. When he was not with the lens he was flashing out messages to the world for Charley Huyck. He did not know that Huyck was lying unconscious and almost dead upon the desert. That the world was coming to catastrophe he knew full well; but where was the man to save it? And most of all, what had his friend meant by the words, "look these up?"

Surely there must be some further information. Through the long, long hours he stayed with the lens and waited. And he found nothing.

It was three days. Who will ever forget them? Surely not Professor Williams. He was sweating blood. The whole world was going to pieces without the trace of an explanation. All the mathematics, all the accumulations of the ages had availed for nothing. Charley Huyck held the secret. It was in the stars, and not an astronomer could find it.

But with the seventeenth hour came the turn of fortune. The professor was passing through the office. The door was open, and the same fitful wind which had played the original prank was now just as fitfully performing restitution. Williams noticed a piece of paper protruding from the back of the bookcase and fluttering in the breeze. He picked it up. The first words that he saw were in the handwriting of Charley Huyck. He read:

In the last extremity—in the last phase when there is no longer any water on the earth; when even the oxygen of the atmospheric envelope has been reduced to minimum—man, or whatever form of intelligence is then upon the earth, must go back to the laws which governed his forebears. Necessity must ever be the law of evolution. There will be no water upon the earth, but there will be an unlimited quantity elsewhere.

By that time, for instance, the great planet, Jupiter, will be in just a convenient state for exploitation. Gaseous now, it will be, by that time, in just about the stage when the steam and water are condensing into ocean. Eons of millions of years away in the days of dire necessity. By that time the intelligence and consciousness of the earth will have grown equal to the task.

It is a thing to laugh at (perhaps) just at present. But when we consider the ratio of man's advance in the last hundred years, what will it be in a billion? Not all the laws of the universe have been discovered, by any means. At present we know nothing. Who can tell?

Aye, who can tell? Perhaps we ourselves have in store the fate we would mete out to another. We have a very dangerous neighbor close beside us.

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Mars is in dire straits for water. And we know there is life on Mars, and intelligence! The very fact on its face proclaims it. The oceans have dried up; the only way they have of holding life is by bringing their water from the polar snow-caps. Their canals pronounce an advanced state of cooperative intelligence; there is life upon Mars and in an advanced stage of evolution.

But how far advanced? It is a small planet, and consequently eons of ages in advance of the earth's evolution. In the nature of things Mars cooled off quickly, and life was possible there while the earth was yet a gaseous mass. She has gone to her maturity and into her retrogression; she is approaching her end. She has had less time to produce intelligence than intelligence will have—in the end—upon the earth.

How far has this intelligence progressed? That is the question. Nature is a slow worker. It took eons of ages to put life upon the earth; it took eons of more ages to make this life conscious. How far will it go? How far has it gone on Mars?

That was as far as the comments went. The professor dropped his eyes to the rest of the paper. It was a map of the face of Mars, and across its center was a black cross scratched by the dull point of a soft pencil.

He knew the face of Mars. It was the Ascræus Lacus. The oasis at the juncture of a series of canals running much like the spokes of a wheel. The great Uranian and Alander Canals coming in at about right angles.

In two jumps the professor was in the observatory with the great lens swung to focus. It was the great moment out of his lifetime, and the strangest and most eager moment, perhaps, ever lived by any astronomer. His fingers fairly twitched with tension. There before his view was the full face of our Martian neighbor!

But was it? He gasped out a breath of startled exclamation. Was it Mars that he gazed at; the whole face, the whole thing had been changed before him.

Mars has ever been red. Viewed through the telescope it has had the most beautiful tinge imaginable, red ochre, the weird tinge of the desert in sunset. The color of enchantment and of hell!

For it is so. We know that for ages and ages the planet has been burning up; that life was possible only in the dry sea-bottoms and under irrigation. The rest, where the continents once were, was blazing desert. The redness, the beauty, the enchantment that we so admired was burning hell.

All this had changed.

Instead of this was a beautiful shade of iridescent green. The red was gone forever. The great planet standing in the heavens had grown into infinite glory. Like the great Dog Star transplanted.

The professor sought out the Ascræus Lacus. It was hard to find. The whole face had been transfigured; where had been canals was now the beautiful sheen of green and verdure. He realized what he was beholding and what he had never dreamed of seeing; the seas of Mars filled up.

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With the stolen oceans our grim neighbor had come back to youth. But how had it been done? It was horror for our world. The great luminescent ball of Opalescence! Europe frozen and New York a mass of ice. It was the earth's destruction. How long could the thing keep up; and whence did it come from? What was it?

He sought for the Ascræus Lacus. And he beheld a strange sight. At the very spot where should have been the juncture of the canals he caught what at first looked like a pin-point flame, a strange twinkling light with flitting glow of opalescence. He watched it, and he wondered. It seemed to the professor to grow; and he noticed that the green about it was of a different color. It was winking, like a great force, and as if alive; baneful.

It was what Charley Huyck had seen. The professor thought of Charley. He had hurried to the mountain. What could Huyck, a mere man, do against a thing like this? There was naught to do but sit and watch it drink of our life-blood. And then—

It was the message, the strange assurance that Huyck was flashing over the world. There was no lack of confidence in the words he was speaking. "Celestial Kinetics," so that was the answer! Certainly it must be so with the truth before him. Williams was a doubter no longer. And Charley Huyck could save them. The man he had humored. Eagerly he waited and stuck by the lens. The whole world waited.

IT WAS perhaps the most terrific moment since creation. To describe it would be like describing doomsday. We all of us went through it, and we all of us thought the end had come; that the earth was torn to atoms and to chaos.

The State of Colorado was lurid with a red light of terror; for a thousand miles the flame shot above the earth and into space. If ever spirit went out in glory that spirit was Charley Huyck! He had come to the moment and to Archimedes. The whole world rocked to the recoil. Compared to it the mightiest earthquake was but a tender shiver. The consciousness of the earth had spoken!

The professor was knocked upon the floor. He knew not what had happened. Out of the windows and to the north the flame of Colorado, like the whole world going up. It was the last moment. But he was a scientist to the end. He had sprained his ankle and his face was bleeding; but for all that he struggled, fought his way to the telescope. And he saw:

The great planet with its sinister, baleful, wicked light in the center, and another light vastly larger covering up half of Mars. What was it? It was moving. The truth set him almost to shouting.

It was the answer of Charley Huyck and of the world. The light grew smaller, almost a pin-point, on its way to Mars.

The real climax was in silence. And of all the world only Professor Williams beheld it. The two lights coalesced and spread out; what it was on Mars, of course, we do not know.

But in a few moments all was gone. Only the green of the Martian Sea winked in the sunlight. The luminous opal was gone from the Sargasso. The ocean lay in peace.

It was a terrible three days. Had it not been for the work of Robold and Huyck life would have been destroyed. The pity of it is that all of their discoveries have gone with them. Not even Charley realized how terrific was the force he was about to loosen.

He had carefully locked everything in vaults for a safe delivery to man. He had expected death, but not the cataclysm. The whole of Mount Robold was shorn away; in its place we have a lake fifty miles in diameter. So much for celestial kinetics.

And we look to a green and beautiful Mars. We hold no enmity. It was but the law of self-preservation. Let us hope they have enough water; and that their seas will hold. We don't blame them, and we don't blame ourselves, either, for that matter. We need what we have, and we hope to keep it.

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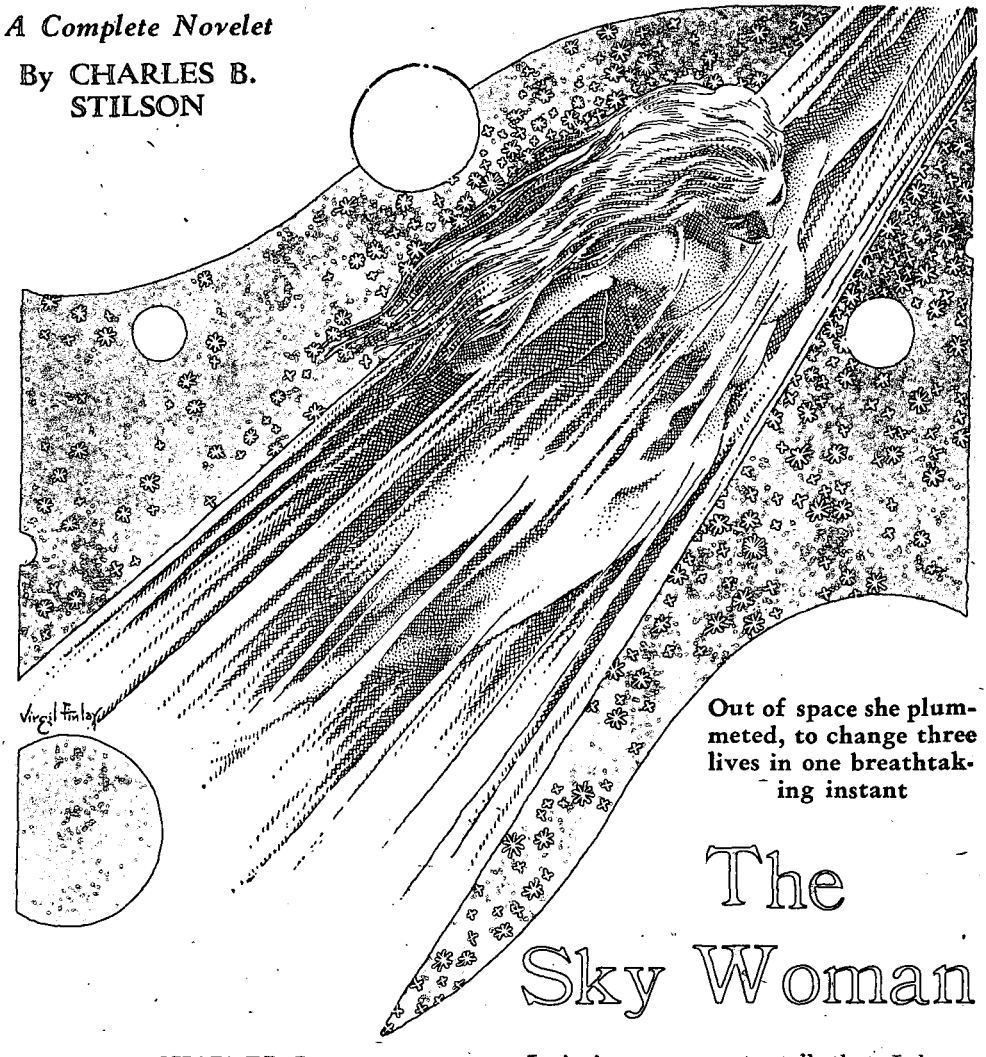
A Complete Novelet

By CHARLES B. STILSON



Out of space she plummeted, to change three lives in one breathtaking instant

The Sky Woman

CHAPTER I

FIRE

I AM twenty-four years old, and—I may as well say it at the start—quite good to look at; that is, I have black hair, brown eyes, even white teeth, and a clear complexion, and they match up passably well. Also I am sure that I know how to wear my clothes to the best advantage, and am neither overgrown nor too tiny. I don't know why I mention these things, for they haven't much to do with what is to follow, though they are quite important to me.

It isn't necessary to tell that I know little about writing. Old Miss Dyver at Wellesley, it is true, used to compliment me upon my descriptive ability when I had her in English. But in the same breath she would waggle her flopsy pomp and deplore my lack of imagination. I believe that it was her opinion that it was a sin to possess so much and not the little more requisite to make a gifted writer—I mean imagination.

Miss Dyver was right. I can tell only what I have seen and felt. Nor am I the least bit scientific. I've had a course in domestic science—you needn't sniff at that—

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but of the things which terminate in "ology" I know next to nothing, and thank Heaven for it!

Yet here am I, Ruth Chasper, as I have introduced myself in three paragraphs, plunging recklessly to tell of what, viewed merely from its scientific side, is without doubt the most wonderful thing which has happened to the world since thinking, sometimes reasoning, women and men were set upon it to wonder why.

"Yee-mah! Yee-mah! Alla ferma na somma!"

The words will ring in my ears forever until I die! What do they mean? Who uttered them? What was she, and whence, and why? Will science in five thousand years more of groping and striving be able to answer? What cosmic secret might the interpretation of that wild, sweet cry lay bare? Or was it but a dying woman's wail of despair?

"Yee-mah! Yee-mah! Alla ferma na somma!"

No it could not have been despair. The creature was too utterly splendid and daring to have given way to it. She would not have yielded to despair, even when she realized that she had failed, and death was before her. It was not despair. It was an undelivered message—a broken link between two worlds.

So much I allow to my lame imagination. Now I will describe what has happened, though I cannot explain it.

Rickey Moyer is my distant cousin, fourth or fifth. Rickey's father, D. B. Moyer, as a coal baron, turned a fearful lot of carbon into currency in the Pennsylvania Alleghanies, and then died and left Rickey alone to spend it.

Coal-grubbing never appealed to Rickey. He finished a course at Amherst, sold out the mines, and traveled. He seemed to have a consuming desire to know the world he was living in, and I guess that he has a speaking acquaintance with most of it. He should have; for he started out when he was twenty-one years old, and spent ten years globe-galloping.

Quite suddenly he came home again, two years ago, built him a bungalow in the forest on Black Bear Mountain above the old Moyer homestead in Center County, and settled down.

With him—and this is where I come in—he brought Count Giuseppe Natali, of Florence. They had met somewhere in Borneo. Both were cosmopolites, both fearless. They had been through dangers together in the Dyak country, and had formed a friendship which stuck.

I met the count for the first time last summer at Palm Beach. Not to go into tiresome details, we soon became engaged. Count Natali is a thoroughly delightful fellow, a gentleman to his slender fingertips, and no fortune-hunter. Else he would not have picked me; for I've none to mention, unless Aunt Caroline—but that has nothing to do with it.

In January of this year Count Natali sailed to Italy to look after business connected with his ancestral estate. I understand that it is immense, and boasts, among other attractions, an ancient feudal castle which makes one think of that creepy old romance, "The Mysteries of Udolpho." On his return in early April, Rickey kidnaped him away from me in New York and took him off to the Pennsylvania wilds.

Soon afterward came an invitation to me to come out for a fortnight, bringing my chum, Carrie Andrews, with Aunt Caroline for chaperon. Carrie was of my class at college. We were both staying with Aunt Caroline at Bayonne.

All three of us thought that it would be a fine little outing—a sort of rest before the strenuosities of the summer season; so I at once wired Rickey that he was on. Naturally I wasn't sorrowful at the prospect of seeing Count Natali again so soon. I had felt that I had rather a bone to pick with Rickey for sequestrating my intended as he had.

Rickey's haunt on Black Bear is no end of a quiet roost; and yet there are plenty of possibilities to while away a couple of weeks, if one cares for them. There is

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excellent trout-fishing in Forge Run, if one doesn't mind wading in hip-boots and meeting an occasional rattlesnake. And there are a number of pleasant motor trips one can take, if one doesn't mind the rough roads and the hills.

I don't mind these things. I was born in Pennsylvania. So was Aunt Caroline, who isn't a bit fussy about such matters. As for Carrie: she is one of those big, slow-moving, non-excitable blond creatures, whom nothing ever seems to disturb. She who would encounter an earthquake or a boa-constrictor with the same casual interest she would bestow upon a new dance. Very like Rickey himself, Carrie is.

LATE in the afternoon of April 17 we were deposited from the up-train at Viaduct, and saw the wooded spine of old Black Bear looming above us across the valley to the left of the tracks.

Viaduct is little more than a signal-tower, a tank, a row of laborers' shanty-shacks, and ten houses—personally I don't believe there are ten; but I am a Pennsylvanian, and I give Viaduct the benefit of a doubt.

Count Natali met us with Rickey's roadster; but Rickey was not with him. Aunt Caroline and Carrie were comfortably discreet while the count greeted me—much more so than a thin-faced woman telegraph-operator, whom I saw watching us with avid interest from the height of her tower. Poor thing! How her eyes would have popped had she known that it was an honest-to-goodness Italian count who was kissing me, or perhaps she did know. Anyhow, she watched, and the proceeding seemed to have her approval.

My first reflection was that Count Natali both looked and felt much better without his mustache. The coating of tan which the spring sun was overlaying on his olive cheeks gave to his thin features the aspect of an Indian chieftain or a Bedouin sheik.

"A-hem!" said Aunt Caroline, after she and Carrie had swept the skyline of Black Bear for what she deemed a proper interval. "A-hem! And where is Richard?"

"Your nephew asked me to make his amends, Mme. Allison," replied Count Natali. "He was unavoidably denied the pleasure of meeting you this evening. We have had a trifle of excitement."

"Fire!" remarked Aunt Caroline, wrinkling her nose and sniffing. "I hope it destroyed nothing valuable."

"Not the bungalow!" I cried dismayedly. I, too, had noticed an acrid, wood-smoky odor about the count's clothes.

"No," he answered our two queries; "only a few trees. I believe that it is now entirely under control. The railroad authorities sent a force of workmen up the mountain to help us. I believe that is their custom—to protect their property."

"*Umph!* I suppose a spark from one of their engines started it, as usual," commented Aunt Caroline.

"Not so; nothing so prosaic." Count Natali shook his handsome head. "It was a very unusual fire; in fact, quite an extraordinary occurrence."

He turned to lead the way to the car.

This began to smack of a mystery. I could see that the count was covertly excited, and I began to feel the thrill of an adventure.

A second later we were in the car, and discussion of the fire for the time was ended. The count manages a car prettily. He whirled us up the zigzag road to the summit of Black Bear.

Rickey and the count had been roughing it; but in deference to our coming Rickey had imported servants up from the big house below, including Mrs. Sanders, a cook whom Aunt Caroline had tried vainly to bribe from his service; so we found everything that three famished and train-weary wights could desire.

CHAPTER II

THE MYSTERY-STONE

NO Rickey was waiting for us at the bungalow. He did not come in until we were taking our places at table. When he did put in an appearance he was

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in such a scandalous condition that I positively was ashamed of him. His tawny hair was all topsyturvy and dark with dust, and his khakis and puttees were smeared with soot and mud, not to mention a black streak across the bridge of his short nose; and numerous holes which flying embers had scorched through his shirt and trousers.

He did not contrast at all favorably with Count Natali, who is always perfection in his get-up. Though, in spite of the dirt and disarray, Rickey still contrived to look cool and efficient.

"Hello, Aunt Caroline and folkses all," was his welcome. He slipped into a chair, and as soon as decency would permit began to eat like a hungry and hurried man.

Have I said that Rickey is a big fellow? No? He is—big and blond and ruddy, with small blue eyes above high cheek-bones—not piggish eyes, but friendly and twinkly, and not a little shrewd, seeing that he inherited them from the coal baron.

"Glad you came, Ruth," he said to me presently. "Joe"—so he always referred to Count Giuseppe—"has been pining. I had to send for you or the blue devils would have got him sure. He's been as disconsolate as a bushman who's lost his fetish."

Naturally I had nothing to say to this. Aunt Caroline charged to the rescue. She had been studying Rickey sharply.

"Please don't talk nonsense, Richard," she cut in. "Tell us about the fire. You look as though you had been rolled in it."

"Oh, yes, the fire," responded Rickey, who had been talking off the top of his mind and thinking hard about something else deeper down.

He glanced at Count Natali, and I think that the count shook his head.

"Well?" from Aunt Caroline.

"Well," echoed Rickey, "we had one, aunty. It was some fire, too, I'll inform the universe, while it lasted, and now it's out."

A prodigious bite of Mrs. Sanders' home-made biscuit interrupted communication. I could hear Aunt Caroline's toe tapping.

Count Natali bridged the gap with questions about our trip. But Aunt Caroline, like an elephant, refused to take the bridge.

"What started it?" she pursued, wading in.

"That's what twoscore men have been laboring all day to discover, aunty," said Rickey tantalizingly. Just then I think that he became aware of Aunt Caroline's foot; for he muttered a hasty word to his biscuit; and at the same time hitched in his chair.

"We thought it was a falling star," he went on, freeing his utterance. "We've been grubbing an amateur coal-mine in the mountain on the strength of finding it and seeing what it's made of."

"I'm *sure* that is nothing to be so secretive about," declared Aunt Caroline.

"And did you find the star at the bottom of your mine?" asked Carrie.

"Yes," Rickey answered; "only it isn't a star." He turned his voice on Count Natali. "That section boss is interested, Joe," he said. "He has sent for an armful of dynamite. He wants to blast it."

"You surely will not allow that?" Anxiety, if not consternation, was in the count's tones.

"Not all in a chunk, anyway."

Aunt Caroline set down her teacup with firmness.

"Richard, will you have the goodness to inform us just what it is that you have found in the hole, which you will or will not blast, and why?" she demanded.

"A meteorite, aunty," replied Rickey, reduced to terms. "At least, by all the rules of the game, it should be a meteorite. It's a large one. The heat engendered by the friction of its hurried transit through our mundane atmosphere was what started the fire and led to its discovery."

"But why not blast it?" I asked, coming to Aunt Caroline's aid, as she had to mine. "Is it dangerous? Is it still too hot?"

"Why blast it at all?" queried Carrie.

Rickey appeared somewhat embarrassed, which in itself was unnatural.

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"Joe and I may be a pair of blithering idiots," he returned; "but we are agreed that this star or meteorite or mystery—mystery, whether star or meteorite—is a very extraordinary proposition. It has—well, it has an uncanny sort of a hand-made appearance."

Aunt Caroline drained her third cup of tea and set it down with a decision that threatened the china.

"Richard," she said, "your explanations are as clear as a Moshannon fog. The only portion of them which is understandable is your hint at your mental condition. How far from here is this phenomenon? I propose to see it before I close my eyes."

It was evident that this declaration relieved Rickey. He brightened up.

"Not more than a mile, aunty," he answered. "We can go the best part of the way in the car, and there will be a fine moon to see by. After you folks have looked the thing over will be time enough to diagnose my mental symptoms. It's either what it ought to be, and Joe and I are jack-donkeyed, or else it's one of the marvels of the ages."

"How intensely interesting you make it sound, Mr. Moyer," volunteered Carrie; and that ended the table conversation so far as concerned the meteorite.

I couldn't help being impressed by Rickey's manner. The mere fact that he was excited—and excitement fairly oozed from his pores—was impressive to one who knew him. But what was he driving at? How on earth could a meteorite be hand-made? What were we about to see up yonder on Black Bear by the light of the moon? If I had possessed a little more imagination, I am sure that I should have shivered.

SOON after our meal Rickey led the way to his touring-car, and the five of us piled in. We three women sat in the tonneau, which was already occupied by Frisky, Rickey's Skye terrier. Frisk, too, had been digging in the burned ground, to judge by appearances, and in his exuberance at seeing so many old acquaintances he insisted upon making a mess of our skirts.

Before we started Rickey fetched out from the bungalow an armful of blankets, which he hung over the robe-rail. As the night was quite warm, I wondered what he wanted of them.

We rolled off northwestward along the crest of Black Bear ridge behind the bungalow clearing, following a narrow, rutty old lumber trail which I remembered from having explored it as a child in search of arbutus, honeysuckle, and teaberries.

After twenty minutes' driving, which the difficulties of the road made very slow, we reached the edge of the burned area. A grand moon had risen, and cast a peculiar light on the carpet of ashes which the fire had left, and against which the jagged stumps of broken trees and the scorched, distorted bodies of those still standing were limned in sharply defined silhouettes.

At intervals a light breeze set this arboreal cemetery to creaking and groaning lugubriously, and fanned our faces with an acrid warmth that was not of the night. Somewhere in the dusky distance a bird was clamoring for the immediate castigation of poor Will. Nearer at hand an owl hooted dolefully—doubtless mourning over having been burned out of her house and home in a hollow log.

"Isn't this delightfully spooky?" whispered Carrie, who would hobnob with a ghost with animation were the opportunity offered, and consider herself in luck. Aunt Caroline sniffed. Frisky yapped at the owl. I kept still and stared. I may be deficient in imagination, but I really did shiver a little. The picture was compelling.

Rickey halted the car.

He jumped out and shouldered his blankets.

We followed him across the soft, crisp flooring of ashes.

Occasionally we passed smoking heaps where the breeze would stir the embers so that little spurts of flame leaped up and

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danced like elves of mischief over the destruction they had done. These were too far isolated from the main forest, Rickey said, to be accounted dangerous. Besides, watch was being kept.

In the center of this desolation we found the cause of it, Rickey's mystery-stone.

Where it had fallen, in the slope of a little dip, or valley, was an ash-strewn pit, some twelve feet across, resembling those shell-craters which one sees in the war movies. Through the lower rim of it workmen with picks and spades had dug a deep trenchlike passage to the stone itself and then had undermined it so that it had toppled from its first position and lay along the trench.

At the bottom of the dip the ashes had been cleared away, and a brisk wood fire was burning, around which a number of men sat upon logs. These were part of the section gang which the railroad had sent up to help Rickey fight the fire. A strong aroma of coffee was grateful to our noses after their long struggle with smoke and soot.

A stockily built man of middle age detached himself from the group at the fire as we came over the edge of the dip. He approached Rickey, an Irish brogue issuing from his broad and exceedingly grimy countenance.

"The dinnymite will be here directly, Misther Moyer," he said, removing his hat. "Shall we be afther crackin' her tonight, sor?"

His voice was eager. His men around the fire strained forward to catch the reply.

"Not tonight, Conoway; we'll do the job by daylight," responded Rickey. "The old railroad can spare a few of you for another day, can't it?"

"Yis—I suppose," assented Mr. Conoway, evidently disappointed.

"You told your man to fetch drills?" pursued Rickey.

"Oh, yis, sor. Ye're sthill daycided to bust her open wid pops, sor?"

"Yes. If there should happen to be anything inside worth looking at, we want to injure it as little as possible. Fetch up a torch or two, will you, Conoway? I want to exhibit our find to the ladies."

We stepped around to the mouth of the passage and looked at the mystery. And I am afraid were not, at first sight, particularly impressed. At least, I was not, save by its size.

It was a monster of a stone, all of fifteen feet long, and at its middle, where its girth was greatest, as thick through as the height of a tall man. I didn't wonder at the great hole it had torn in the earth when it struck, or the depth to which it had penetrated. The bottom of the socket from which it had been tipped was nearly on a level with the floor of the dip. The impact, I thought, must have jarred a considerable portion of the mountain.

AGAINST the newly turned earth of the excavation it contrasted darkly. Its surface must recently have been molten. I touched it with my fingers, and it still was warm. Small stones, gravel, and clods of scorched earth were encrusted in it like gipsy settings. The upper end of it as it lay, which had struck first was splayed out and blunted.

Three of Mr. Conoway's men fetched pine-knot torches and flashed their light into the passage and the pit. I found the glamour of the thing grow upon me. Even a weak imagination was stirred to ponderings.

It lay in the trough of the trench with the wavering torchlight flickering over it, a dull-brown, somber, sullen, inert mass of stone. Yet it was not of our world. It was material evidence of other worlds beyond our ken. To me astronomy and kindred sciences had appealed as largely guess work. Here was evidence that the stars were more than mere watchlights set to brighten our dark ways. Whence had it come, this unearthly visitant? Next to our awe of time is our awe of distance. How many millions of miles had it fallen? The thought dizzied me.

"Isn't it fortunate that it did not strike upon rock instead of earth?" said Carrie,

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pointing to its jammed and misshapen tip.

"Would have been one grand smash, and nothing left but flinders," remarked Rickey. "I shouldn't have cared to have been riding in it at the time."

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Aunt Caroline, prodding at it with her toes. "What is there about it to give you such ideas? Why do you suppose that something may be inside of it?"

Count Natali took a torch from a laborer's hand.

"But see, *madame,*" he urged, stepping into the trench to the head of the stone. "And do you come hither, too, *carissima*" —this to me—"and Mlle. Andrews, and see."

I followed until I could peer over his stooping shoulder. Aunt Caroline and Carrie squeezed in on the other side. We stared where he pointed.

"I see nothing, except that it has been broken," said Aunt Caroline, readjusting her slipping spectacles.

"Yes, *madame;* a fragment has been chipped away by a hammer-blow. Now watch closely."

He moved one of his slender fingers along the fresh scar, tracing a zigzag pattern. Looking closely, we could then see a darker line in the substance of the rock.

"It looks like an irregular seam—a suture," remarked Carrie, who won honors in physiology.

"It may be only a vein in the rock," suggested Aunt Caroline; but her skepticism was shaky.

"Too regular, aunty," countered Rickey. "It's a joint, and a devilish clever one, and it's closed with some kind of cement that is harder than adamant. What do you say, Conoway?"

"The same as I did at first, sor," the Irishman answered. "There's something inside of that there that somewan put there for to stay, sor. Unless the bodies up yon are gunnin' for us down here, an' their projacktul didn't go off." Conoway pointed toward the stars.

"No, I don't think it's a heavenly 'dud,'" laughed Rickey, and added soberly, "but just the same someone up there may have fired it."

"I am going home and going to bed," announced Aunt Caroline, backing out of the trench.

"Joe will drive you girls back," said Rickey.

"What are you going to do?" asked aunt.

"Sleep by it." Rickey tumbled his blankets into the trench. "Some of these chaps here have it in their heads that this stone is a kind of wandering treasure chest full of diamonds and gold, and that they've only to crack it to see 'em come pouring out. I'm going to guard against anything premature."

"All right," Aunt Caroline assented. "Don't you dare to open that thing, Richard, until I am here in the morning. I shall get up at half-past eight."

"Right-o, aunty. If anyone tries to dynamite it before you get on the job he'll have to blow me to glory along with it."

"In which case you might find out where it came from and why," said Carrie. On the way back to the bungalow she asked, "What did Mr. Conoway mean by 'pops,' I wonder?"

"It is that they will drill the stone full of small holes, *mademoiselle,*" explained Count Natali, "and explode the dynamite in light charges, chipping away the stone a fraction at a time."

CHAPTER III

WHAT THE STONE CONTAINED

LESS prepossessing, but more mystery-laden, was the big stone by the light of next morning's sun. We arrived at the scene of operations shortly after nine o'clock, Aunt Caroline having made the concession of rising earlier than she had promised. The preparations for blasting were in full swing.

Three power-drills had been lugged up the mountainside in the night, and six swarthy workmen were busy along the trench, attacking the surface of the stone

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with an uproar which must have resembled a continuous volley of machine guns. A dozen others were waiting to spell them. The balance of the fire-fighting force, much against their inclinations, had been herded down the mountain by Mr. Conoway to less interesting employment.

I noticed that all of the laborers, with the exception of the Irishman, treated Count Natali with an obsequious deference, rather strange to an American, until one reflected that most of them probably were Italians, and the others from lands where counts count for more than they do here.

Viewed by daylight, the irregular line in the substance of the stone which had been disclosed by the hammer-blow, and which Carrie had dubbed a suture, was even more noticeable than it had been under the torches.

Count Natali found us a position near the rim of the little amphitheater, from where we could watch the proceedings safely, and where we could talk undisturbed by the clattering, popping drills, which made conversation in their immediate vicinity an impossibility.

Presently came Rickey, dirtier and more elated than ever, to announce:

"We'll be blasting in another half hour. We've been at her since sun-up."

Aunt Caroline, who had once more inspected the odd, jointlike appearance of the stone, was disposed to argue.

"Isn't it quite possible, Richard, that it is something let fall from an airplane?" she asked. "These aviators are becoming as careless as motorists."

From the corners of her eyes she glanced in the direction of Count Natali.

"Considering that it must weigh all of twenty tons, I'm afraid that your suggestion is hardly tenable, aunty," replied Rickey, his eyes twinkling. "Aviators don't carry such pebbles around for ballast."

"Some time ago I read in the newspapers that attempts were to be made to signal to Mars at about this time. Mightn't it be that this is some sort of a Jules Verne projectile, which has been fired from earth, and fallen back?"

This was from Carrie. Aunt Caroline gave her an approving look.

Rickey smiled and went down among the workmen. What a big, capable fellow he was! Mr. Conoway, who cared nothing for counts, was, in his Irish way, as deferential to Rickey as were the others to the nobleman.

SOON after the expiration of the half hour the clamor of the drills ceased. They had pecked a neat double row of holes along the upper side of the stone. One by one the holes were charged with dynamite, and the explosive set off from a hand battery. They cracked like big firecrackers. At each explosion a shower of fragments flew up from the surface of the stone and fell around the lower part of the dip.

When the first row of holes had been blown out, Count Natali went down to inspect the work. From where we sat we could see that the stone was beginning to present a gnawed and ill-used appearance.

"Nothing at all," was the count's report as he came back.

An explosion of greater violence than any of the others followed.

After the crash there sounded a hissing like that of escaping steam. The laborers below ran toward the trench shouting.

Rickey thrust his arm recklessly into the opening. Then he called for a drill-rod, which Mr. Conoway handed to him, and I saw its slender length disappear in the stone, and heard the clink of it as he groped around in the inside.

"Does he expect to find a rabbit?" Aunt Caroline murmured.

"It is that there is a cavity, and another stone is within," reported Count Natali. "It is very strange. It has the appearance of a sarcophagus." His fingers trembled as he stroked the place where his mustache had been. "I believe that it is a find."

"A mummy! That's not so bad!" exclaimed Aunt Caroline triumphantly. She had caught at the word sarcophagus. "I knew someone must have dropped the thing. They must have been hurrying it

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to some museum. Probably it will be advertised."

"How interesting if it is the mummy of a Martian," put in Carrie, not without malice, and drew a quick "Nonsense!" from aunt.

A number of blasts followed in rapid succession. The great stone seemed to leap and crumble in its bed. I shrieked; for several objects like coiled serpents flew into the air whirling, and one of them nearly fell on my foot.

Count Natali stooped down and picked it up.

It was a powerful metal spring!

Only a glance we bestowed upon it, and then stared down the hillside.

Where had been the long brown mass of stone was a heap of débris and earth fallen from the trench. Partly buried in the pile was a cylinder, more slender and shapely than its husk had been. Its surface was polished, and it reflected the light of the sun in a greenish sheen.

We arose and went down to it.

It was like a great coffin hewn for a giant. Whether it was of stone or metal we could not tell. In one spot a fragment had been chipped away by the blasts, and the fracture was scintillant with tiny particles which refracted the light vividly. At intervals the entire surface was pitted with sockets, for the springs which had maintained it centered in the interior vacuum of its shell. There had been many springs, nearly two hundred.

Mr. Conoway's workmen gathered about the trench, shouting, chattering and gesticulating. They were inclined to crowd us, until at a stern word from Count Natali they drew to one side.

I laid a hand upon the cylinder and shivered. It was chill as ice with an unearthly cold.

Aunt Caroline stared down at it and shuddered from other motives.

"What a godlike way to be buried," soliloquized Carrie. "To be hurled out through uncounted millions of miles of space and rest at last upon an unknown world!"

Aunt Caroline's "Nonsense!" was noably weak.

"Why do you folkses all take it so for granted that there's a dead one in here?" asked Rickey, clapping a hand on the cylinder and drawing it hastily away.

"Rickey!" I cried. "You don't mean to suggest that there may be something *alive* in there!"

"Well, and why not? Those chaps who were clever enough to shoot it across should know some way to preserve life for the few months necessary for the transit. I shall not be surprised to find the traveler in good condition and famously ready for his breakfast."

Months! Yes, Rickey was right about that. I hadn't reflected that it might take nearly a year for an object to fall from Mars to the earth, if this thing *was* from Mars.

"When is the opening scheduled to be?" Carrie inquired. "I am anxious to meet the gentleman; and he can't be very comfortable in that box."

"I should think that he, or it—if anything living was sealed in there—would be frozen," I said, thinking of the intense cold I had felt.

Count Natali in turn stooped and laid a hand on the sarcophagus.

"But that was the purpose of the vacuum space, *carissima mia,*" he explained, oblivious of the stares which this endearment drew from his countrymen; "to provide an intervening coldness, so that what was within might not be destroyed by the heat which fused the surface of the stone. It is like a monster thermos bottle."

Aunt Caroline glanced from one to another of us in bewilderment.

CHAPTER IV

THE CRYSTAL CASKET

OUR dark-skinned laborers were waiting with unconcealed impatience to attack the job. Not for them were fanciful spectulations as to where the strange object might have come from. To them it was a treasure trove, in which they pos-

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sibly might share. At an order from Mr. Conoway they swarmed into the trench, and loose earth and stones began to fly. Rickey seized an extra spade, and his two great bronzed arms did double the work of the best of them.

Count Natali fetched the blankets down the slope and fixed another seat for us.

Before the trench was more than partially cleared we could see that a clearly marked line of junction extended lengthwise around the sarcophagus. Cover had been joined to body with great exactness, and only the thinnest of red lines indicated the presence of a cement. At intervals along the sides of the sarcophagus some manner of sockets, larger than those in which the spring had been fitted, had been sunk on the juncture line, and these too were filled with the reddish substance.

Rickey dug at one of them with the nail-file in his penknife.

"Hello; this stuff isn't so hard," he said. "Fetch some chisels, somebody, and we'll clear these places out."

Buried in the cement of each socket was a bent metal bar, or L-shaped handle, similar to those upon kitchen water-taps. Some of them were turned upwards and others down, but all were at right angles to the cement-filled line.

As the sarcophagus lay somewhat askew in the trench, crowbars were applied until is rested squarely upon its bottom. Then Rickey tightened a wrench upon one of the sunken handles and held it while Mr. Conoway struck it a smart tap with a hammer. It turned, slowly at first, and then more easily, until it stopped on a line with the cemented joint of the sarcophagus.

One after another all the handles were turned. Still the joint was firm. Under Rickey's direction an octette of workers set the blades of chisels and the points of their crowbars at intervals along the line, and as many more men with hammers or pieces of stone struck upon them simultaneously.

A shout went up as the stubborn lid was seen to be yielding and rising. At just the right instant Rickey thrust a crowbar into the widening interstice, and pried with all his broad-shouldered might.

Lubricated by the soft cement, the huge lid moved almost without noise, balanced, swayed, toppled, and subsided with a *thunk* on the earth of the trench.

We three sprang up and rubbed elbows with the crowding men. But this, as was remarked by Mr. Conoway, was a particularly well-packed parcel. Nothing of its contents was to be seen save a mass of grayish, woolly-appearing stuff, so tightly wadded and compressed that it retained the imprint of the inside of the lid as though it had been modeling clay.

Only Mr. Conoway's bellows of restraint prevented the laborers from stampeding and making short work of this, to such pitch had risen their eagerness to lay bare the treasure.

"This is your package, boss," he said to Rickey.

Rickey nodded, stuck his hands into the stuff and pulled out no great amount.

"Gee, it's rammed in tight enough!" he grunted, and attacked it again.

Curiosity moved Count Natali to take a wisp of the wadding, step back a few paces, and touch a lighted match to it. It refused to burn, or so much as scorch.

"Huh! The beggars know asbestos," commented Rickey, who had watched the operation. "Let your gang tackle this stuff, Conoway, if they're so blamed anxious."

"Aye, sor."

But they had understood, and did not wait for the Irishman's order. A score of muscular brown hands, reaching from both sides of the sarcophagus, seized the asbestos packing and tore it out. Among them was one pair of slender woman's hands, wrinkled and tremulous. Aunt Caroline, her habitual dignity for the moment in abeyance, was laboring to vindicate her theory, and took her pound of asbestos with the rest of them. The stuff came out in wads and layers. There seemed to be no end of it. Dust flew from it and choked us.

Count Natali pressed my arm.

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"How excited we all are; is it not so, *carissima?*" he said.

His soft clasp hardened to a grip of iron, and I gasped with the pain of it.

"Por Dio!" he whispered, and again, *"Por Dio!"*

Then for many seconds all our group was silent, and a quarter of a mile down the slope of Black Bear I heard plainly the splash and tinkle of Forge Run flinging itself endessly over a ten-foot fall.

For a great layer of the asbestos had come away in the workers' hands, and disclosed the contents of the sarcophagus.

As a newly-fallen icicle might lie embedded in a bank of rain-soiled snow, a crystal casket lay glittering against the bed of dull-gray asbestos which surrounded it, and within the casket's gleaming panels lay neither mummy nor man, but a woman with sun-gold hair.

Many authors have written that we of womankind are prone to see our sisters through cats' eyes and to judge them with prejudice and jealousy. That may be true; I won't argue it. But I, another woman, shall think always of the being who lay in that scintillant crystal casket as the most beautiful thing that ever came to earth. So poignant was the beauty of her that mere memory of it hurts.

No language which has yet been written can make one see the perfections of her—perfections of every line and contour of face and figure—and I am not going to make myself ridiculous by attempting to put the burden upon my English.

But she was a blonde of a blondness which made poor Carrie's type look dingy and scrubby by contrast. She lay easily upon a long cushion affair of soft, white material, which had been crinkled and padded around her until it fitted her as the satin of a jewel-case fits the brooch of pearls for which it was made.

It was difficult to believe that such a radiant thing could die; though I suppose that all of us who were staring into that crystal casket had no other thought than that she must be dead. The casket itself and all its trappings suggested death. But its inmate, by her easy posture, the bloom of her cheeks and the carmine of her lips, suggested slumber only.

Her costume is hardly worth mentioning. It was—well, what a fastidious woman might have chosen for a nap, and scant. Her hair flowed loose. She wore no jewels of any kind, not so much as a single finger-ring. But had she come to us bedizened with gems and arrayed like Balkis, she could never have impressed us as she did lying there in simple white in the white purity of her glittering crystal casket.

We stared, and were as still as she.

ODDLY enough, it was Mr. Conoway who first broke our startled silence.

"Raymarkably well prayserved, isn't she, sor?" he said to Rickey, and removed his hat.

Count Natali's grip of my arm—the flesh bore blue fingermarks for days—relaxed, and with something very like an oath he caught up one of the blankets and threw it across the sarcophagus, hiding the casket from profaning eyes.

"Thank you, Joe," acknowledged Rickey, shaking himself as though coming out of a dream. He had not heard Mr. Conoway's first banality. The Irishman committed a second.

"Beloike wan of us had betther be afther notifyin' the coroner, sor," he remarked solemnly, and put on his hat again.

"I will attend to it, Conoway," answered Rickey, "depend upon it. Now, if I may impose upon you a bit more, I'll have your gang here give us a lift with that casket, and we'll take it over to the bungalow. We can sling it in the blankets over a couple of poles."

All this while not a word from Aunt Caroline or Carrie. I stole a peep at them. Aunt was weeping softly into her handkerchief. Carrie was lost in thought.

Mr. Conoway's laborers made a difficulty about complying with Rickey's request. When it turned out that there was no treasure in the sarcophagus, they, after their first surprise, experienced a rapid loss of interest, replaced by a superstitious

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fear of its contents. They refused to touch the crystal case, until Count Natali, exerting an influence superior to Mr. Conoway's threats, virtually compelled them to do it.

The count drove us slowly back to the bungalow. Behind us, Rickey followed, directing ten of the laborers, who, walking two and two, carried the casket in a blanket sling.

"Poor thing' Poor thing!" said Aunt Caroline, recovering speech. "I shall see her face to the day of my death. Don't talk to me about her, please. I'm very much upset, really."

We ate a subdued dinner, while the casket, swathed in blankets, lay upon the floor in Rickey's hunting-room, which looks north. Out of deference to Aunt Caroline's state of mind, we forbore reference to it during the meal.

Various as I suppose our views concerning it were, it exercised a fascination upon us all, and we were soon gathered around it again.

"I hope you will have her decently buried as soon as possible, Richard," said aunt, as, after another long look at the unworldly beauty of the occupant of the crystal case, she turned away, shaking her head sadly.

"Buried!" he echoed. "Not until I am sure that she is really dead."

Aunt's jaw fell.

"Richard!" she ejaculated, "you're not —you're not going to—"

"I'm going to take the means necessary to be certain," he replied firmly. He knelt down and began to inspect the casket.

Count Natali made a pretense of assisting him—a pretense, I say; for it was patent that he could not keep his eyes from the woman.

Aunt Caroline seated herself on a divan and gazed fixedly out the window, her toes keeping up a ceaseless tattoo on the floor.

Moved by I do not know what impulse, Carrie went to Rickey's baby-grand in the corner, and began to strum mournfully in a slow minor key. I continued to stand by the head of the casket.

"Air tight, and perhaps soundproof," said Rickey at the end of ten minutes. "Here's some kind of a lever, which seems to connect through to a sort of tank arrangement inside, and there's apparently another lever inside here, near her shoulder. Shall I chance it, Joe?" He laid a hand on the outer lever.

The count nodded abstractedly, though I am sure that he had not sensed the question.

Rickey pressed the lever. His sleeve was turned back, and I saw the cords of his forearm bulge under the skin. The lever yielded noiselessly for an inch or more.

"There," he said, "now let's see what happens."

Nothing apparently, not immediately. We waited for I suppose five minutes, though it seemed fifteen; Rickey squatted on his haunches, Count Natali kneeling, and I standing.

I cried out sharply. I was first to see it—the flutter of a pulse in the neck.

Before I could point out my discovery to the others, the woman's bosom heaved softly, and at once a tide of rich color swept into her cheeks.

She *was* alive!

CHAPTER V

THE VISITOR FROM THE SKY

CARRIE and aunt had come at my cry. We stared down at this miracle in silence, and with swirling senses. Then Rickey swore softly to himself, and I think we were all grateful to him, even aunt.

"She is not dead, but sleeping," murmured Aunt Caroline.

"I'm going to waken her," said Rickey.

With the handle of his pocket-knife he struck upon the side of the casket, near the woman's head. The crystal rang like a bell under the blow. Aunt started violently.

"Richard! Stop that instantly!" she commanded. Really it did seem a fearful thing to do, but Rickey struck three times.

Mrs. Sanders, who could not have been far from the door, thrust her gray head through and asked if anything was wanted.

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"You may bring tea, Sanders," replied Aunt Caroline weakly. Mrs. Sanders cast a horrified glance at the casket and withdrew.

The crystal had not ceased to vibrate under Rickey's last blow when the woman within stirred; a change of expression passed across her features, and she opened her eyes. They were black as night, when I had thought that they would have been blue.

For only an instant her face retained the bewilderment of the newly-awakened; then the brain took command, and she looked up into Count Natali's face and smiled. I heard him catch his breath with a gasp, and he bent nearer the casket. She seemed to see only him of all of us, and as if in response to his involuntary movement, her hands crept up until they came in contact with the crystal lid of her prison.

The feel of it touched the spring of memory. She flashed a glance at the rest of us, and her wonderful eyes widened. Groping at her shoulder with one hand, she pressed the lever which Rickey had discoverd there. It released hidden springs, or else there was a pressure of gas within the narrow chamber. The lid rose swiftly, discovering that it was hinged at one side, and fell over on the heap of blankets.

A puff of cool, choking atmosphere struck me in the face. I inhaled some of it, and it dizzied me. I reeled back and took hold of a chair for support.

The strange woman arose from her cushioned rest, and extending a hand to Count Natali for his aid, stepped out upon the floor.

One glimpse of her face I had before the catastrophe.

Asleep, she had been of supernal beauty; awake, her black eyes flashing, and her cheeks aglow, her face presented such a combination of intellect and passion as I have never seen or expect to see upon any other mortal countenance, fleshly or painted. Queenly is too weak an adjective to describe it, but it is the only one I can think of.

For an instant I saw her so, smiling as Count Natali bowed low before her. Then came a change, a terrible change. She had taken a step forward. Her mouth was open for speech, when I saw her glorious eyes go wide. She swayed, one hand clutching at her bosom, and the ripe color faded in her cheeks.

Whatever weakness had come upon her, I thought at the moment she had overcome. She moved on toward the north door with a regal carriage, still holding Natali's hand, but she did not speak, and her face was like death.

At the doorway she paused and looked down the sunlighted slopes of Black Bear and up at the cloudless sky. A supreme triumph conquered the shadow of disaster in her face. Half turning, she let fall Count Natali's fingers, raised her white arms above her head, and cried in a voice like a silver bell:

"Yee-mah! Yee-mah! Alla ferma na somme!"

It was her swan song. Before the echoes of the marvelous voice had ceased to thrill us, she had collapsed, choking, into the Italian's arms.

We ran toward them and helped him to carry her to the divan, but all we could do was useless. In three minutes she was dead.

When that fact was sure we stood and stared stupidly. Natali hung over her, his face like that of a carven statue, the statue of a red Indian or a Bedouin sheik. From the instant when she had smiled into his eyes, for him, the rest of us had ceased to exist.

Our spell of sorrow and horror was broken by Mrs. Sanders, who bustled in with an armful of tea-things, sized up the situation, and fainted in a terrific clatter.

I recall hearing Carrie say, "I wish I could do that; I do really," and then my nerves would stand no more. Instead of turning to and helping them resuscitate Mrs. Sanders, I escaped to my room, and for more than an hour did battle with a round of hysterics.

When I was once more presentable. I found that Aunt Caroline had retired with

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a headache—I suspect that it was another name for what had ailed me—and Carrie had gone out for a walk in the woods.

Rickey and Count Natali were in the hunting room, my cousin sitting dejectedly upon the divan, and the count standing at the north doorway and looking down the mountainside. The crystal casket had again received its burden, and the blankets were over it.

"Well, I suppose there is only one thing to be done, Joe," I heard Rickey say as I came down the stairs, "and that is to do as the Irishman said, and call in the coroner. Then we will bury her."

"No; I beg of you to let me dispose of those arrangements," interposed the count earnestly, without turning from his stand. "I know that you will not gainsay me, my friend. I will go down at once to the station. I have messages to dispatch." He stepped out without seeing me, and a couple of minutes later we heard him leaving in one of Rickey's cars.

Rickey caught sight of me and jumped up. I suppose that I must have looked woebegone, for he shook his head over me, and then managed to grin.

"I say, Ruth, old girl, let's you and I go out and walk it off," he proposed.

At the edge of the clearing we met Carrie coming in. Her eye-lids were swollen.

RICKEY explained to me what he thought had happened. It was our air which had killed the strange visitor. The atmosphere of earth must be of a different quality from that at Mars.

"But I don't see how we could have helped it," he said. "She attempted a splendid thing, and failed. I feel like crying like a baby every time I think of the sheer pluck of her."

I did, too. It was as if a goddess had died, as Carrie said afterward.

I saw the sky woman only once more. It was in the night, that same night. I could sleep only in nervous cat-naps, and when I did I dreamed such fantasies that it was a relief to wake from them. Finally I gave it up, and put on a dressing-gown and sat at the window. There was a white moon and a silence, and I thought and thought.

At first my musings were disjointed and silly, evidenced by the persistent running through my mind of two lines of a rather vulgar old college ditty:

> Sing ho for the great Semiramis!
> Her like we shall ne'er see again—

which came to me, as such things sometimes will insist in our human brains upon intruding themselves among the sacrosanct and the sublime.

Truth to tell, contemplation of the events of the day gave me a touch of vertigo. The stupendous hardihood and daring of the sky woman overawed me. She could not have known that she would find human beings to release her, nor had she means to release herself; yet she had taken the thousandth chance, and had herself flung out through the space toward our world, gambling her life with magnificent recklessness.

Had she missed her mark, she might have fallen through infinity and eternity; perhaps been sucked into the vortex of some blazing sun, to perish like a moth in a candle-flame. All these things she had weighed, and still her splendid spirit had been undaunted.

Surely this was the supreme test of mortal courage, confidence and fortitude; or it was fatalism to its *n*th power. To die is less than she had offered. She had made the cast, and failed; and before the sheer splendor of her failure the most glorious human achievements that I could think of were dimmed. Columbus launching himself westward across unknown waters in his leaky caravels, was a puny comparison.

And no glory had offered, not as we rate glory; she could not have returned to tell her people that she had succeeded.

An impulse grew strong upon me to go down to the hunting-room. I fought it, for I was afraid; but it conquered, and I stole down the stairs to take another look at the wondrous stranger. How glad I have always been that I did so!

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The blankets had been thrown back from the crystal case, and the moonlight shone in through a window and gleamed and glittered frostily upon its translucent fabric and upon the beauty, now pallid and awful, of its occupant.

I paused upon the rug without the doorway; for the sky woman was not alone.

At the head of the casket sat, or rather crouched, Count Natali. His face was toward me, but he did not see me; his eyes were upon the dead. One by one, great, slow tears were trickling down his cheeks.

As I stood there, almost afraid to breathe, Rickey stepped in through the outer door. He too had been moved to night-wandering from his bed it seemed, for he was in his bathrobe. He saw Count Natali, and went to him and laid a hand upon his shoulder

"Come, Joe, old man, best go to bed," he said.

"I cannot, my friend," Natali answered. "I must watch. Something has come to me that is tearing my heart to shreds. How shall I say it? I—" His voice broke, and he pointed to the casket and covered his face.

"I think that I can understand, Joe," said Rickey very gently. "I am sorry."

I crept back upstairs and to bed. I too understood. I suppose that I ought to have felt jealous and horrid, but I didn't. I just felt very small and insignificant and lost.

Poor sky woman! Living or dead, I would not have fought you. Anyway, I couldn't have competed with a princess of the blood royal of Mars—and she must have been all of that

In the morning Rickey took me for another walk in the woods.

"Joe has asked me to tell you something, little one," he began, facing me squarely, but speaking in a I'd-rather-be-hung-than-do-it manner.

"Then you needn't," I interrupted, "for I know what it is. I was at the door of the hunting-room last night, and I couldn't help overhearing part of it. And you needn't be compassionate, Rickey Moyer, for somehow I can't seem to care as perhaps I should—and I'm glad—"

Maybe I leaned just the least bit toward him, he looked so big and strong and leanable. Anyway, his hand crept under my chin. I don't know what he saw in my tilted face; but next instant I was crying against his breast-pocket, and he was holding me comfortingly tight in his great arms and telling me that he had cared for me since we were small, "only somehow Joe seemed to have beat me to it."

So, you see, I have found compensation for what the sky woman cost me. Rickey and I are to be married soon.

And the sky woman? Count Natali had her embalmed in some marvelous Italian fashion and took her back to Italy with him. I often have a vision of him sitting in a moonlighted hall of his old Udolpho castle with his dead but imperishable bride, while the slow tears glisten upon his cheeks and fall upon her crystal casket.

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Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

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The Conquest of the Moon Pool

By A. MERRITT

Part IV

What happened before:

Dr. Walter T. Goodwin set out to investigate thoroughly an appalling phenomenon. This was the disappearance of Dr. David Throckmartin's wife and associates in the Moon Pool, and disappearance later of Throckmartin himself. On the way to the Island of Nan-Matal, and the entrance to the vast cavern in which was the Moon Pool, Goodwin met Captain Olaf Huldricksson who said that a "sparkling devil" had come down the path of the moon and taken his wife and his little daughter, Freda. With the captain and Larry O'Keefe of the Royal Air Force, Goodwin landed on Nan-Matal.

They passed the Moon Rock and were imprisoned in the lair of the Dweller of the Moon Pool, with a stranger, Dr. von Hetzdorp, a German scientist. A beautiful girl accompanied by a huge frog-woman appeared to them, and by signs showed them the secret springs that opened the wall before them.

At last they arrived in a vast country, miles below the surface, where existed a race of powerful dwarfs, ruled over by a beautiful woman, Yolara, priestess of the Shining One, and Lugur, "The Voice," a man of herculean strength. Yolara soon showed that she was attracted by Larry, thereby arousing the fury of Lugur. But Larry, having fallen in love with the vision of the Moon Pool Chamber whom he had learned was Lakla, handmaiden of the Silent Ones, and as good as Yolara is evil, did not respond.

The German and Lugur joined forces. That the powerful influence of Lakla and the Silent Ones was on their side gave Larry and Dr. Goodwin hope.

At a ceremony dedicated to the Shining One, Yolara declared her intention of taking Larry for her mate then and there. The ceremony was proceeding, when Lakla and her frog-men warriors appeared.

CHAPTER XXIII

"THESE THE SILENT ONES SUMMON!"

THROUGH the grotesque ranks of the frog-men Lakla paced, and halted close beside me. From firm little chin to dainty buskined feet she was swathed in the soft metallic robes; these of a dull, almost coppery hue. The left arm was hidden, the right free and gloved, the gloving disappearing high in the shoulder folds. Wound tight about the arm was one of the vines of the sculptured wall and of Lugur's circled signet-ring. Thick, a vivid green, its five tendrils ran between her fingers, stretching out five flowered heads that gleamed like blossoms cut from gigantic, glowing rubies.

So she stood for a moment, contemplating Yolara, from whose visage the mask had fled, leaving, it is true, a face still seared with rage and hate, but human. Drawn perhaps by my gaze, she dropped her eyes upon me; golden, translucent, with tiny flecks of amber in their aureate irises, the soul that looked through them was as far removed from that flaming out of the priestess's as zenith is above nadir.

I noted the low, broad brow, the proud

Dr. Goodwin feels the evil forces of Muria closing relentlessly in on himself and his friends. What can he do to forestall the plot which will loose the Furies of Inside Earth upon the already anxious world above?

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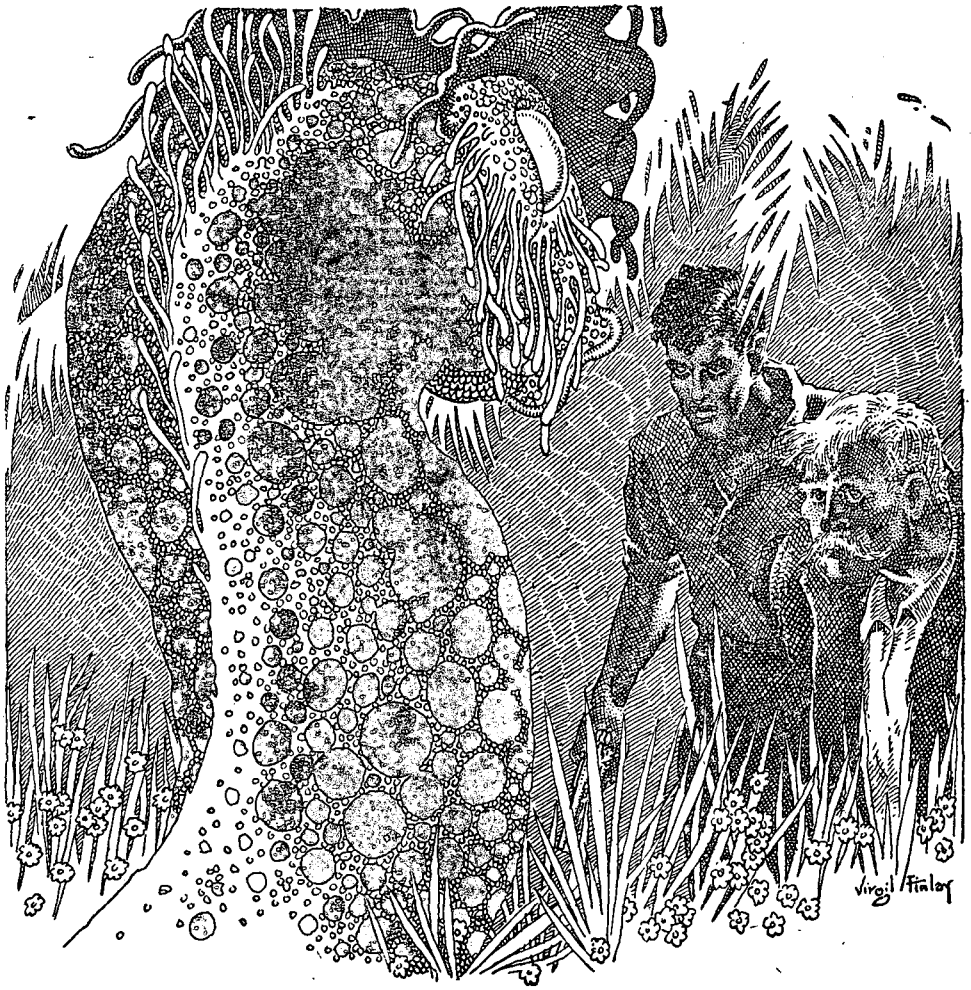

Swiftly the Thing upreared, more and more of it drawing into sight as the head of horror mounted —until it stood above us like a scaled tower

little nose, the tender mouth, and the soft—sunlight—glow that seemed to transfuse the delicate skin. And suddenly in the eyes dawned a smile—sweet, friendly, a touch of roguishness, profoundly reassuring in its all humanness. I felt my heart expand as though freed from fetters, a recrudescence of confidence in the essential reality of things. As though in nightmare the struggling consciousness should glimpse some familiar face and know the terrors with which it strove were but dreams. And involuntarily I smiled back at her.

She raised her head and looked again at Yolara, contempt and a certain curiosity in her gaze; at O'Keefe—and through the softened eyes drifted swiftly a shadow of sorrow, and on its fleeting wings deepest interest, and hovering over that a naïve approval as reassuringly human as had been her smile. She spoke, and her voice deep-timbered, soft gold as was Yolara's all silver, was subtly the synthesis of all the golden glowing beauty of her.

"The Silent Ones have sent me, O Yolara," she said. "And this is their command to you. That ye deliver to me to bring before them three of the four

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strangers who have found their way here. This man they summon"—she pointed to O'Keefe—"and this"—her hand almost touched me—"and that yellow-haired one who seeks his mate and babe"—and how knew she of Olaf's quest? I wondered. "But for him there who plots with Lugur"—she pointed at Von Hetzdorp, and I saw Yolara start—"they have no need. Into his heart the Silent Ones have looked; and Lugur and you may keep him, Yolara!"

There was honeyed venom in the last words. And let me write here that truly angelic as Lakla might look and on occasion be, great as was her heart and high her spirit, she was very human indeed. Feminine through and through, and therefore not disdainful, when they served her, either of woman's guile or woman's needle tongue.

Yolara was herself again; now only the edge of shrillness on her voice revealed her wrath as she answered the Handmaiden.

"And whence have the Silent Ones gained power to command, *choya?*"

This last, I knew, was a very vulgar word; I had heard Rador use it in a moment of anger to one of the serving maids, and it meant, approximately, "kitchen girl," "scullion." Beneath the insult and the acid disdain, the blood rushed up under Lakla's ambered ivory skin. Her hand clenched, and I thought I saw writhe the vine that braceleted her arm.

"Yolara"—her voice was calm—"of no use it is to question me. I am but the messenger of the Silent Ones. And one thing only am I bidden to ask you—do you deliver to me the three strangers?"

Lugur was on his feet; eagerness, sardonic delight, sinister anticipation thrilling from him. And my same glance showed Von Hetzdorp, crouched, biting his fingernails, glaring at the Golden Girl.

"No!" Yolara fairly spat the word. "No! Now by Thanaroa and by the Shining One, no!" Her eyes blazed, her nostrils were wide, in her fair throat a little pulse beat angrily. "You, Lakla, take you *my* message to the Silent Ones. Say to them that I keep this man"—she pointed to Larry—"because he is mine. Say to them that I keep the yellow-haired one and him"—she pointed to me—"because it pleases me.

"Tell them that upon their mouths I place my foot, so!" She stamped upon the dais viciously. "And that in their faces I spit!" And her action was hideously snakelike. "And say last to them, you handmaiden, that if *you* they dare send to Yolara again, she will feed *you* to the Shining One! Now—go!"

THE handmaiden's face was white.

"Not unforeseen by the three was this, Yolara," she replied. "And did you speak as you have spoken, then I was bidden to say this to you." Her voice deepened. "Three *tal* have ye to take counsel, Yolara. And at the end of that time three things must ye have determined, either to do or not to do. First, send the strangers to the Silent Ones; second, give up, ye and Lugur and all of ye, that dream ye have of conquest of the world without; and, third, forswear the Shining One!

"And if ye do not one and all these things, then are ye done, your cup of life broken, your wine of life spilled. Yea, Yolara, for ye and the Shining One, Lugur and the Nine and all those here and their kind shall pass! This say the Silent Ones, 'Surely shall all of ye pass and be as though never had ye been!'"

Now a gasp of rage and fear arose from all those around me, but the priestess threw back her head and laughed loud and long. Into the silver sweet chiming of her laughter clashed that of Lugur, and after a little the nobles took it up, till the whole chamber echoed with their mirth. O'Keefe, lips tightening, moved toward the handmaiden, and almost imperceptibly, but peremptorily, she waved him back.

"Those *are* great words. Great words indeed, *choya,*" shrilled Yolara at last; and again Lakla winced beneath the word.

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"Lo, for *laya* upon *laya,* the Shining One has been freed from the three; and for *laya* upon *laya* they have sat helpless, rotting. Now I ask you again—whence comes their power to lay their will upon me, and whence comes their strength to wrestle with the Shining One and the beloved of the Shining One?"

And again she laughed, and again Lugur and all the fair-haired joined in her laughter.

Into the eyes of Lakla I saw creep a doubt, a wavering; as though deep within her the foundations of her own belief were none too firm.

She hesitated, turning upon O'Keefe eyes in which rested more than suggestion of appeal! And Yolara saw, too, for she flashed with triumph, stretched a finger toward the handmaiden.

"Look!" she cried. "Look! Why, even *she* does not believe!" Her voice grew silk of silver—merciless, cruel. "Now am I minded to send another answer to the Silent Ones. Yea! But not by *you,* Lakla; by these." She pointed to the frog-men, and, swift as light, her hand darted into her bosom, bringing forth the little shining cone of death.

But before she could level it, dart the Keth upon her, the Golden Girl had released that hidden left arm and thrown over her face a fold of the metallic swathings. Swifter than Yolara, she raised the arm that held the vine, and now I knew this was no inert blossoming thing. It was alive! It writhed down her arm, and with its five rubescent flower heads thrust itself out toward the priestess—vibrating, quivering, held in leash only by the light touch of the handmaiden at its very end.

From the swelling throat pouch of the monster behind her came a succession of the reverberant boomings I had heard when the little tendrils of moon flame began to shrink back to the crystal globes. The frog-men wheeled, raised their lances, leveled them at the throng. Around the reaching ruby flowers a red mist swiftly grew.

The silver cone dropped from Yolara's rigid fingers; her eyes grew stark with horror; all her unearthly loveliness fled from her. She stood pale-lipped, face shrunken, shorn of beauty by that one gesture of Lakla's as Samson was of his strength by the first clip of Delilah's shears. The handmaiden dropped the protecting veil, and now it was she who laughed.

"It would seem, then, Yolara, that there is a thing of the Silent Ones ye fear!" she said. "Well, the kiss of the Yekta I promise you in return for the embrace of your Shining One."

She looked at Larry, long, searchingly, and suddenly again with all that effect of sunlight bursting into dark places, her smile shone upon him. She nodded, half gaily; looked down upon me again, the little merry light dancing in her eyes; waved her hand to me.

She spoke to the giant frog-man. He wheeled behind her as she turned, facing the priestess, club upraised, fangs glistening. His troop moved not a jot, spears held high. And Lakla began to pass, slowly—almost, I thought, tauntingly—and as she reached the portal Larry leaped from the dais.

"*Alanna!*" he cried. "You'll not be leavin' me just when I've found you!"

In his excitement he spoke in his own tongue, the velvet brogue appealing. Lakla turned, and well it was that she did, for her Gargantuan follower boomed a warnote and swept the great mace over his horned head, whirling it downward as the Irishman rushed forward.

There was a sharp cry from the handmaiden, and he halted the club not a foot from O'Keefe's black hair.

The Irishman looked him up and down, stretched out his hand, and patted the scaled arm approvingly, as one would a dog.

"Good boy," he said; "good boy! But I wouldn't harm a hair of her sweet head for all the jewels in all the crowns the kings of Ireland ever wore. Let me by!"

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THE monster's enormous eyes, direct on Larry, were unblinking, but from the huge throat came a puzzled croak. He turned toward the Golden Girl as though expecting some order.

The handmaiden contemplated O'Keefe, hesitant, unquestionably longingly, irresistibly. She was like a child making up her mind whether she dared or dared not take a delectable something offered her.

"I go with you," said O'Keefe, this time in her own speech. A glimmer of a smile passed through her eyes. "Come on, Doc!" He reached out a hand to me.

But now Yolara spoke. Life and beauty had flowed back into her face, and in her purple eyes all her hosts of devils were gathered.

"Do you forget what I promised you before Siya and Siyana? Or what I promised you should you turn from me! And do you think that you can leave me—me—as though I were a *choya*—like her." She pointed to Lakla. "Do you—"

"Now, listen, Yolara," Larry interrupted almost plaintively. "No promise has passed from me to you, and why would you hold me?" He passed unconsciously into English. "Be a good sport, Yolara," he urged. "You have got a very devil of a temper, you know, and so have I; and we'd be really awfully uncomfortable together. And why don't you get rid of that devilish pet of yours, and be good!"

She looked at him, puzzled. Von Hetzdorp leaned over, translated to Lugur. The red dwarf smiled maliciously, drew near the priestess. Whispered to her what was without doubt as near as he could come in the Murian to Larry's own very colloquial phrases.

Yolara stiffened, her lips writhed.

"Hear me, Lakla!" she cried, her voice vibrant with determination unshakable. "Now would I not let you take this man from me were I to dwell ten thousand *laya* in the agony of the Yekta's kiss. This I swear to you, by Thanaroa, by my heart, and by my strength, that should you try to take him, or should he try to go with you, then shall I slay both him and you with the Keth, and even though the Yekta you carry blast me. And may my strength wither, my heart rot in my breast, and Thanaroa forget me if I do not this thing!"

"Listen, Yolara—" began O'Keefe again.

"Be silent, you!" It was almost a shriek. And her hand again sought in her breast for the cone of death.

Lugur touched her arm, whispered again. The glint of guile shone in her eyes; she laughed softly, relaxed.

"The Silent Ones, Lakla, bade you say that they allowed me three *tal* to decide," she said suavely. "Go now in peace, Lakla, and say that Yolara has heard, and that for the three *tal* they—allow—her she will take counsel."

The handmaiden hesitated, a vague apprehension, a hint of doubt in her face.

"The Silent Ones have said it," she answered at last. "Stay you here, strangers." The long lashes drooped as her eyes met O'Keefe's and a hint of blush was in her cheeks. "Stay you here, strangers, till then. But, Yolara, see you on that heart and strength you have sworn by that they come to no harm. Else that which you have invoked will come upon you swiftly indeed. And that *I* promise you," she added.

Their eyes met, clashed, burned into each other. Black flame from Abaddon and golden flame from Paradise.

"Remember!" said Lakla, and passed through the portal. The gigantic frog-man boomed a thunderous note of command, his grotesque guards turned and, slowly, eyes menacing, followed their mistress. And last of all passed out the monster with the mace.

CHAPTER XXIV

LARRY'S DEFIANCE

A CLAMOR arose from all the chamber; stilled in an instant by a motion of Yolara's hand. She stood silent,

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regarding O'Keefe with something other now than the blind wrath of her threat to him. Something half regretful, half beseeching. But the Irishman's control was gone.

"Yolara"—his voice shook with rage, and he threw caution to the wind—"now hear *me*. I go where I will and when I will. Here shall we stay until the time *she* named is come. And then we follow her, whether you will or not. And if any should have thought to stop us, tell them of that flame that shattered the vase," he added grimly.

The wistfulness died out of her eyes, leaving them cold.

"Is it so?" she answered. "Now it is in my mind that much may happen ere then. Perchance you and those others may dance with the Shining One. Or perchance one of those hidden men that I showed you may visit you. Or it may be that I myself will slay ye, and not so swiftly, Larree."

"And is that so?" he said, slipping back into English. "A promise means as much to you as it does to the head of Von Hetzdorp's country." And now, the breath of danger having blown upon him, back came his old, alert careless, whimsical self. "Before that sweet little pet of yours"—he spoke now in her own tongue—"that you name the Shining One, dances with us, Yolara, many shall wither under that swift flame I showed you; and as for you, think whether you may not feel it, too, before you have a chance to slay. And as for those hidden ones of yours, Yolara, know you that I have *anui*"—he used the Murian for spirit, the Polynesian *ani*—"who will warn me long, long before they can don those robes that hide them."

A sparkle came into his eyes. "Lo, Yolara, even before you can command them, shall you hear the voice of my spirit, and it is this." He threw back his head, and from his throat pulsed the woe-laden, sobbing cry, raising steadily into the heart-shaking, shuddering wail that I had heard on the deck of the *Suwarna*. Louder and ever louder it wailed, died away into the soul-broken sobbing, and faltered out into silence!

Upon those listening, sensitive as they were to sound, the effect of the high-pitched keening was appalling; it was gruesome enough to me. There was startled movement, a panic rush from the tables to the portal. Even Lugur's face was gray; the priestess's eyes stark wide; in Von Hetzdorp's I saw ungrudging admiration.

"And when you hear that, Yolara," thus O'Keefe, "know that my spirit is near, and think well before you send your hidden ones, or come yourself."

No answer made the priestess to him. She turned to the white-faced nobles.

"What Lakla has said, the council must consider, and at once," said she. "Now, friends of mine, and friends of Lugur, must all feud, all rancor, between us end." She glanced swiftly at Lugur. "The *ladala*—the common people—are stirring, and the Silent Ones threaten. Yet fear not, for are we not strong under the Shining One? And now—leave us."

She waited until the last of the fair-haired had withdrawn. Her hand dropped to the table, and she gave, evidently, a signal, for in marched a dozen or more of the green dwarfs.

"Take these two to their place," she commanded, pointing to us. "But wait—" She turned to the whispering globe, touched its control. Its light broke, swam with the film of rushing colors.

"Rador," she spoke upon it, "the two strangers come to you. Guard them and the third named Olaf as you would your life. And—listen well, Rador—if you do not, and if they should escape you, then before you die shall you beg me for what shall seem to you *laya* upon *laya* to throw you to the Shining One!"

THE green dwarfs clustered about us. Without another look at the priestess O'Keefe marched beside me, between them, from the chamber. But glancing round, I saw pain writhe beneath the

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frozen anger on her face. And in silence she and Lugur and the council and Von Hetzdorp watched us as we passed through the portals. And it was not until we had reached the pillared entrance that Larry spoke.

"I hated to talk like that to a woman, Doc," he said, "and a pretty woman, at that. But first she played me with a marked deck, and then not only pinched all the chips, but drew a gun on me. What the hell! She nearly had me *married* to her. I don't know what the stuff was she gave me; but, take it from me, if I had the recipe for that brew I could sell it for a thousand dollars a jolt at Forty-Second and Broadway.

"One jigger of it, and you forget there is a trouble in the world; three of them, and you forget there is a world. You'll admit, Doc, that it wasn't the kind of thing for a lady to pull on an unsuspecting guest, won't you? Hardly cricket, what? No excuse for it, Doc; and I don't care what you say or what Lakla may say, it wasn't my fault. And I don't hold it up against myself, either."

"I must admit that I'm a bit uneasy about her threats," I said, ignoring all this. He stopped abruptly.

"What're you afraid of?"

"Mostly," I answered dryly, "I have no desire to dance with the Shining One!"

"Listen to me, Goodwin." He took up his walk impatiently. "Cut the bated-breath approach you use whenever you talk about that bunch of animated fireworks. You scientific people are such slaves to fact that when you meet a new one that isn't in your own neat little catalogue you either pass it by with the haughty air or hold up your hands in wonder and scream."

"Larry!" I cried, a little dazed and more than a little indignant.

"Olaf's no better," he said. "But I can make allowances for him. He's a sailor. No, sir. What this expedition needs is a man without superstition. And remember this. The leprechawn promised that I'd have full warning before anything happened. And if we do have to go out, we'll see that banshee bunch cleans up before we do, and pass in a blaze of glory. And don't forget it. And hereafter—I'm —in—charge!"

By this time we were before our pavilion; and neither of us in a very amiable mood, I'm afraid. Rador was awaiting us, and, to my surprise, cold indeed was his greeting. He took us from our guard, placed a whistle to his lips, and down the paths came a score of his own men.

"Let none pass in here without authority, and let none pass out unless I accompany them," he ordered brusquely. "Summon one of the swiftest of the coria and have it wait in readiness," he added, as though by afterthought.

But when we had entered and the screens were drawn together his manner changed; all eagerness, he questioned us. Briefly we told him of the happenings at the feast, of Lakla's dramatic interruption, and of what had followed.

"Three *tal*," he said musingly; "three *tal* the Silent Ones have allowed—and Yolara agreed." He sank back, thoughtful.

A *tal* in Muria is the equivalent of thirty hours of earth surface time.

"*Ja!*" It was Olaf. "*Ja!* I told you the Shining Devil's mistress was all evil. *Ja!* Now I begin again that tale I started when he came." He glanced toward the preoccupied Rador. "And tell him not what I say should he ask. For I trust none here in Trolldom, save the *Jomfrau* —the White Virgin!"

"After the oldster was *adsprede*"—Olaf once more used that expressive Norwegian word for the dissolving of Songar—"I knew that it was a time for cunning, craft. I said to myself, 'If they think I have no ears to hear, they will speak; and it may be I will find a way to save my Helma and Dr. Goodwin's friends, too.' *Ja*, and they did speak. When I left that place with the red devil and the German, they made many signs.

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"THE red Trolde asked the German how came it he was a worshipper of Thanaroa." I could not resist a swift glance of triumph toward O'Keefe. "And the German," rumbled Olaf, "said that all his people worshiped Thanaroa and now fought against the other nations that denied him. He said that his ruler believed his people the chosen of Thanaroa, and because the other nations had defied him, his people had taken up arms. *Ja!* And Lugur believed—for Lugur he worships Thanaroa more, much more than the shining devils. *Ja!*

"And then we had come to Lugur's palace. They put me in rooms, and there came to me men who rubbed and oiled me and loosened my muscles. The next day I wrestled with a great dwarf they called Valdor. He was a mighty man, and long we struggled, and at last I broke his back. And Lugur was pleased, so that I sat with him at feast and with the German, too. And again, not knowing that I understood them, they talked.

"The German had gone fast and far. No longer was there talk of his ruler, but of Lugur as head man of the Germans, and Von Hetzdorp under him. They spoke of the green light that shook life from the oldster; and Lugur said that the secret of it had been the Ancient Ones' and that the council had not too much of it. But Von Hetzdorp said that among his race were many wise men who could make more once they had studied it.

"Then he spoke of the robes that protected from the Shining Devil. Lugur told him of the priests who make them and of the earth they dig that coats them. Then said the German that his wise men would make many for themselves, in case the Shining Devil should ever grow too strong, and that Lugur and he and his nation would give the Shining Devil all the rest of the world to eat. So that Lugur and he and all the Germans should always be mighty as he was when the Shining Devil ate up those who cast themselves into it.

"And the next day I wrestled with a great dwarf named Tahola, mightier far than Valdor. Him I threw after a long, long time, and his back also I broke. Again Lugur was pleased, saying that now was I worthy to be slain by him. And again we sat at table, he and the German and I. This time they spoke of something these Trolde have which opens up a *Svaelc*—abysses into which all in its range drops up into the sky!"

"What!" I exclaimed.

"I know about them," said Larry. "Wait!"

"Lugur had drunk much," went on Olaf. "He was boastful. The German pressed him to show this thing. After a while the red one went out and came back with a little golden box. He and the German went into the garden. I followed them. There was a *lille Hoj*—a mound—of stones in that garden on which grew flowers and trees.

"Lugur pressed upon the box, and a spark no bigger than a sand grain leaped out and fell beside the stones. Lugur pressed again, and a blue light shot from the box and lighted on the spark. The spark that had been no bigger than a grain of sand grew and grew as the blue struck it. And then there was a sighing, a wind rush, and the stones and the flowers and the trees were not. They were *forsvinde*—vanished!

"Then Lugur, who had been laughing, grew quickly sober; for he thrust the German back, far back. And soon down into the garden came tumbling the stones and the trees, but broken and shattered, and falling as though from a great height. And Lugur said that of *this* something they had much, for its making was a secret handed down by their own forefathers and not given them by the Ancient Ones.

"They feared to use it, he said, for a spark thrice as large as that he had used would have sent all that garden falling upward and might have opened a way to the outside before—he said just

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this—*'before we are ready to go out into it!'*

"The German questioned much, but Lugur sent for more drink and grew merrier and threatened him, and the German was silent through fear. Thereafter I listened when I could, and little more I learned, but that little enough. *Ja!* Lugur is hot for conquest; so Yolara and so the council. They tire of it here, and the Silent Ones make their minds not too easy, no, even though they jeer at them! And this they plan—to rule our world with their Shining Devil that Lugur says has grown strong enough to fare forth.

"Already they have tunneled upward at that place they call the Lower Waters, and that I think is under Ponape itself. There was to be their gathering-place to sweep out upon the earth. But now Von Hetzdorp has told Lugur of the passage through which we came, and Lugur and he now plan to open that.

"The *ladala* they will almost utterly destroy before they go, except the soldiers and the dream makers. They talk of 'sealing' the Silent Ones within their Crimson Sea, but—and this is point of trouble—they fear that if they do it they may pull down all this place they call Muria. Those who speak against it say— 'The Silent Ones can have no power on earth, never have they had it. And it may be that we shall not do well under the sun; perhaps we may wish to return —and let the haven be open in case of our need.'

"Lugur would burn all bridges behind him; destroying all. But not so Yolara. And Von Hetzdorp would not, because he would keep what is here for Germany, and in his heart, too, he laughs at the Silent Ones and he schemes to—*smadre*—smash all these people. Yet has he played upon Lugur by promising him that his own people will cast aside their rulers and will muster to Lugur and that Lugur as a new ruler of Germany and the Shining Devil as Earth God, shall rule all the world for Thanaroa. And under his whisperings Lugur begins to forget even Thanaroa!"

The Norseman was silent for a moment; then, voice deep, trembling—

"Trolldom is awake; Helvede crouches at Earth Gate whining to be loosed into a world already devil ridden! And we are but three!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE COUNCIL'S DECISION

I FELT the blood drive out of my heart. But Larry's was the fighting face—of the O'Keefe's of a thousand years. Rador glanced at him, arose, stepped through the curtains; returned swiftly with the Irishman's uniform.

"Put it on," he said, brusquely; again fell back into his silence and whatever O'Keefe had been about to say was submerged in his wild and joyful whoop. He ripped from him glittering tunic and leg swathings.

"Richard is himself again!" he shouted; and each garment, as he donned it, fanned his old devil-may-care confidence to a higher flame. The last scrap of it on, he drew himself up before us.

"Bow down, ye divils!" he cried. "Bang your heads on the floor and do homage to Larry the First, Emperor of Great Britain, Autocrat of all Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales, and adjacent waters and islands! Kneel, ye scuts, kneel."

"Larry," I cried, "are you going crazy!"

"Not a bit of it," he said. "I'm that and more if Herr Von Hetzdorp keeps his promise. Whoop! Bring forth the royal jewels an' put a whole new bunch of golden strings in Tara's harp an' down with the Sassenach forever! Whoop!"

He did a wild jig.

"Lord how good the old togs feel," he grinned. "The touch of 'em has gone to my head. But it's straight stuff I'm telling you about my empire."

He laughed again; then sobered.

"Not that it's not serious enough at that. A lot that Olaf's told us I've surmised from hints dropped by Yolara. But

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I got the full key to it from the von himself when he stopped me just before —before"—he reddened—"well, before I acquired that brand-new brand of souse. Do you remember, Goodwin, away back in the Moon Pool Chamber that the German made a very curious remark about being certain that I always spoke what was in my mind, and that he'd remember it?

"Funny, funny psychology—the German. He made a picture of me in his mind. A somewhat innocent, frank, truthful, and impulsive Larry O'Keefe; always saying right out just what I thought and with no subterfuge or guile about me. That's the picture he carried in his neat German mind—and by the shade of Genseric the Vandal let me be any different if I dared!

"Maybe he had a hint—maybe he just surmised—that I knew a lot more than I did. And he thought Yolara and I were going to be loving little turtle doves. Also he figured that Yolara had a lot more influence with the Unholy Fireworks than Lugur. Also she could be more easily handled. All this being so, what was the logical thing for him to do? Sure, you get me, fella! Throw down Lugur and make an alliance with me! So *he* calmly offered to ditch the red dwarf if *I* would deliver Yolara. My reward was to be said emperorship! Can you beat it? Good Lord!"

He went off into a perfect storm of laughter. But not to me did this thing seem at all absurd; rather in it I sensed the dawn of catastrophe colossal.

"But how would they get to Germany —how carry the Shining One—"

"Oh, that's all worked out," answered Larry, airily. "There's a German warship hiding down there in the Carolines somewhere. The von knows where it is. Also he has a nice little wireless rigged up on one of the Nan-Matal islets. With that boat equipped with the Keth— He confided to me that they had apparatus that could sweep it over a fifty-mile range, and a few of those gravity-destroying bombs Olaf described—"

"Gravity-destroying bombs!" I gasped.

"Sure! The little fairy that sent the trees and stones kiting up—Von Hetzdorp licked his lips over *them*. What they do is to cut off gravity, just about as the shadow screens cut off light. And consequently whatever's in their range just naturally goes shooting up toward the moon." He sobered. "I admit I'm a bit scared about them, Doc! Anyway with those two things and—oh, yes, gentle, invisible soldiers walking around assassinating all the leaders of the rest of the world—well, *bingo* for all the rest of our world, Goodwin!

"And take it from me old chap, it's not a dream. We've got to beat Von Hetzdorp and all the rest of 'em to it, Goodwin," he ended, solemnly enough.

"But the Shining One?" I began.

"Yolara's to nurse the sweet little thing," he said. "It'll follow her like a lamb, Von Hetzdorp says. And there's something about that I don't understand."

"Something? I don't understand a bit of it," I interrupted, almost testily.

"No," he grinned. "I don't mean what It is. I mean how it's controlled. Oh, well, I'll bet Lakla knows all about it. And I'll bet we'll soon be hearing her tell us," he ended grimly.

"But Larry," I exclaimed, stupidly enough I confess. "You shook hands with Von Hetzdorp on it."

"Oh, the ingenuous, the unsuspecting childlike mind of science," he intoned, piously. "Old dear, aren't you spoofing me? Why, Doc, just as I'd make love to Hecate at the gates of Hades if it would find me the way to the Golden Girl, I'd kiss—yes, actually kiss—Von Hetzdorp if it would give me one more minute to block a game like this. It's bad medicine for our world, Doc, whichever way you look at it. And as Olaf says, there's only three of us!

"Not that I mind Fireworks," he concluded. "If I had Fireworks outside I could finish—It—with one splash of a down-town New York high-pressure fire hose. But the other stuff—*are the goods!*"

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FOR once Larry's courage, his unquenchable confidence, found no echo within me. Not lightly, as he, did I hold that dread mystery the Dweller. And a vision passed before me, a vision of an Apocalypse undreamed by the Evangelist.

A vision of the Shining One swirling into our world, a monstrous, glorious flaming pillar of incarnate, eternal Evil. Of peoples passing through its radiant embrace into that hideous, unearthly life-in-death which I had seen enfold the sacrifices. Of armies trembling into dancing atoms of diamond dust beneath the green ray's rhythmic death. Of cities rushing out into space upon the wings of that other demoniac force which Olaf had watched at work. Of a haunted world through which the assassins of the Dweller's court stole invisible, carrying with them the very passion of hell. Of the rallying to the Thing of every sinister soul and of the weak and the unbalanced, mystics and carnivores of humanity alike; for well I knew that, once loosed, not even Germany could hold this devil-god for long, and that swiftly its blight would spread!

And then a world that was all colossal reek of cruelty and terror; a welter of lusts, of hatreds and of torment; a chaos of horror in which the Dweller waxing ever stronger, the ghastly hordes of those it had consumed growing ever greater, wreaked its inhuman will!

At the last a ruined planet, a cosmic plague, spinning through the shuddering heavens; its verdant plains, its murmuring forests, its meadows and its mountains manned only by a countless crew of soulless, mindless dead-alive, their shells illumined with the Dweller's infernal glory. And flaming over this vampirized world like a flare from some hell far, infinitely far, beyond the reach of man's farthest flung imagining—the Dweller!

Panic gripped my throat, strangled me. My science could not help. What god or gods could? Olaf had turned to ancient Thor and Odin. O'Keefe's faith was in banshees!

Rador jumped to his feet; smiled amiably at us, walked to the whispering globe. He bent over its base; did something with its mechanism; beckoned to us. The globe swam rapidly, faster than ever I had seen it before. A low humming arose, changed into a murmur and then from it I heard Lugur's voice clearly.

"It is to be war, then?"

There was a chorus of assent—from a council I thought.

"I will take the tall one named Larree." It was the priestess's voice. "After the three *tal*, you may have him, Lugur, to do with as you will."

"No!" It was Lugur's voice again, but with a rasp of anger. "All three must die."

"He shall die," again Yolara. "But I would that first he should see Lakla die, and that she know what is to happen to him."

"No!" I started—for this was Von Hetzdorp. "Now is no time, Yolara, for one's own desires. This is my council. At the end of the three *tal* Lakla will come for our answer. Your men will be in ambush and they will slay her and her escort quickly with the Keth. But not till that is done must the three be slain, and then quickly. With Lakla dead we shall go forth to the Silent Ones—and I promise you that I will find the way to destroy them!"

"It is well!" It was Lugur.

"It *is* well, Yolara." It was a woman's voice, and I knew it for that old one of ravaged beauty. "Cast from your mind whatever is in it for this stranger, either of love of hatred. In this the council is with Lugur and the man of wisdom."

THERE was a silence. Then came the priestess's voice, sullen but—beaten.

"It is well!"

"Let the three be taken now by Rador to the temple and given to the High Priest Sator." Thus Lugur. "Until what we have planned comes to pass."

Rador gripped the base of the globe;

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abruptly it ceased its spinning. He turned to us as though to speak and even as he did so its bell note sounded peremptorily and on it the color films began to creep at their accustomed pace.

"I hear," the green dwarf whispered. But now we could no longer distinugish the words. He listened.

"They shall be taken there at once," he said, at last, gravely. The globe grew silent.

He stepped toward us. Larry had drawn his automatic; Olaf and I followed his example. We faced the green dwarf defiantly.

"You have heard," he said, smiling faintly.

"Not on your life, Rador," said Larry. "Nothing doing!" And then in the Murian's own tongue, "We follow Lakla, Rador. And *you* lead the way." He thrust the pistol close to the green dwarf's side.

Rador did not move. But his eyes gleamed their approval as they looked up into the Irishman's determined ones.

"Of what use, Larree?" he said, quietly. "Me you can slay, but in the end you will be taken. Life is not held so dear in Muria that my men out there or those others who can come quickly will let you by, even though you slay many. And in the end they will overpower you."

There was a trace of irresolution in O'Keefe's face.

"And," said Rador, "if I let you go, I dance with the Shining One—or worse!"

O'Keefe's pistol hand dropped.

"You're a good sport Rador, and far be it from me to get you in bad," he said. "Take us to the temple. When we get there—well, your responsibility ends, doesn't it?"

The green dwarf nodded; on his face a curious expression. Was it relief? Or was it profound emotion higher than this?

Whatever it was he turned curtly.

"Follow," he said. We passed out of that gay little pavilion that had come to be home to us even in this alien place. The guards stood at attention.

"You, Sattoya, stand by the globe," he ordered one of them. "Should the Afyo Maie ask, say that I am on my way with the strangers even as she has commanded."

We passed through the lines to the corial standing like a great shell at the end of the runway leading into the green road.

"Wait you here," he said curtly to the driver. The green dwarf ascended to his seat, sought the lever and we swept on—on and out upon the glistening obsidian.

Then Rador turned and laughed.

"Larree," he cried, "I love you for that spirit of yours! And did you think that Rador would carry to the temple prison a man who would take the chances of death upon his own shoulders to save him? Or you, Goodwin, who saved him from the rotting death? For what did I take the corial or lift the veil of silence that I might hear what threatened you—"

Laughing again into our amazed faces he swept the corial to the left, away from the temple approach.

"I am done with Lugur and with Yolara and the Shining One!" cried Rador. "My hand is for you three and for Lakla and those to whom she is handmaiden!"

The shell leaped forward; seemed to fly.

"Whence go we, Rador?" I gasped in his ear.

"Straight to that bridge that guards the way to the Crimson Sea," he shouted, "and pray whatever gods you worship that we pass it before ever Yolara finds whence our way has led!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CASTING OF THE SHADOW

NOW we were flying down toward that last span whose ancientness had set it apart from all the other soaring arches. The shell's speed slackened; we approached warily.

"We pass there?" asked O'Keefe.

The green dwarf nodded, pointing to the right where the bridge ended in a

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broad platform held high upon two gigantic piers, between which ran a spur from the glistening road. Platform and bridge were swarming with men-at-arms; they crowded the parapets, looking down upon us curiously but with no evidence of hostility. Rador drew a deep breath of relief.

"We don't have to break our way through, then?" There was disappointment in the Irishman's voice.

"No use, Larree!" Smiling, Rador stopped the corial just beneath the arch and beside one of the piers. "Now listen well. They have had no warning, hence does Yolara still think us on the way to the temple. This is the gateway of the Portal, and the gateway is closed by the Shadow. Once I commanded here and I know its laws. This must I do—by craft persuade Serku, the keeper of the gateway, to lift the Shadow; or raise it myself. And that will be hard and it may well be that in the struggle life will be stripped of us all. Yet is it better to die fighting than to dance with the Shining One!"

"Ja!" It was Olaf, eyes again ice glinting as he clutched one of Rador's broad shoulders. *"Ja!* Well, it is to die fighting—but I would slay Lugur before I die!"

"And so you may, strong one," laughed the green dwarf. "For here Lugur will surely come when the alarm is given; and they will try to save us for a slower death. And now, see to those flame tubes of yours. And follow my lead, for too long have we waited here."

He swept the shell around the pier. Opened a wide plaza paved with the volcanic glass, but black as that down which we had sped from the Chamber of the Moon Pool. It shone like a mirrored lakelet of jet. On each side of it arose what at first glance seemed towering bulwarks of the same ebon obsidian; at second revealed themselves as structures hewn and set in place by men. Polished faces pierced by dozens of high, narrow windows each ovaled with exquisite intaglios of feathered serpent and the flower snake that Lakla had called the Yekta and with whose kiss she had threatened Yolara.

Down each facade a stairway fell, broken by small landings on which a door opened. They dropped to a broad ledge of grayish stone edging the lip of this midnight pool and upon it also fell two wide flights from either side of the bridge platform. Along all four stairways the guards were ranged. And here and there against the ledge stood the shells, in a curiously comforting resemblance to parked motors in our own world.

The somber walls bulked high; curved and ended in two obelisked pillars. From these, like a tremendous curtain stretched a barrier of that tenebrous gloom which, though weightless as shadow itself, I now knew to be as impenetrable as the veil between life and death. In this murk, unlike all others I had seen, I sensed movement. A quivering, a tremor constant and rhythmic; not to be seen yet caught by some subtle sense; as though through it beat a swift pulse of—black light.

In the center of the pit of glittering darkness, poised over the depths that were like some frozen spring upwelling from inky Styx itself, we hung for a moment watching.

The green dwarf turned the corial slowly to the edge at the right; crept cautiously on toward where, not more than a hundred feet from the barrier, a low, wide entrance opened in the fort. Guarding its threshold stood two guards, armed with broadswords, double handed, terminating in a wide lunette mouthed with murderous fangs. These they raised in salute and through the portal strode a dwarf huge as Rador, dressed as he and carrying only the poniard that was the badge of office of Muria's captainry.

"Ho, Rador!" he hailed, merrily. "Why hover without when within are cheer and welcome?"

The green dwarf swept the shell expertly against the ledge; leaped out.

"Greeting, Serku!" he answered. "I was but looking for the coria of Lakla."

"Lakla!" exclaimed Serku. "Why, the

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handmaiden passed with her Akka nigh a *va* ago!"

"Passed!" The astonishment of the green dwarf was so real that half was I myself deceived. "You let her pass?"

"Certainly I let her pass." But under the green dwarf's stern gaze the truculence of the guardian faded. "Why should I not?" he asked, apprehensively.

"Because Yolara commanded otherwise," answered Rador, coldly.

"There came no command to me." Little beads of sweat stood out on Serku's forehead. "Else would I surely have obeyed—"

"Serku," interrupted the green dwarf swiftly, "truly is my heart wrung for you. This is a matter of Yolara and of Lugur and the council; yes, even of the Shining One! And the message was sent, and the fate, mayhap, of all Muria rested upon your obedience and the return of Lakla with these strangers to the council. Now truly is my heart wrung, for there are few I would less like to see dance with the Shining One than you, Serku," he ended, softly.

LIVID now was the gateway's guardian, his great frame shaking.

"Come with me and speak to Yolara," he pleaded. "There came no message. Tell her—"

"Wait, Serku!" There was a thrill as of inspiration in Rador's voice. "This corial is of the swiftest—Lakla's of the slowest. With Lakla scarce a *va* ahead we can reach her before she enters the Portal. Lift you the Shadow. We shall bring her back and this will I do for you, Serku."

Doubt tempered Serku's panic.

"Why not go alone, Rador, leaving the strangers here with me?" he asked, and I thought not unreasonably.

"Nay then." The green dwarf was brusque. "Lakla will not return unless I carry to her these men as evidence of our good faith. There is strife brewing, Serku, battle between Muria and the Silent Ones. Nor have I time to explain more with Lakla now a *va* away. Come, we will speak to Yolara and she shall judge you." He started away, but Serku caught his arm.

"No, Rador, no!" he whispered, again panic-stricken. "Go you, as you will. But bring her back! Speed Rador!" He sprang toward the entrance. "I lift the Shadow—"

Into the green dwarf's poise crept a curious, almost a listening, alertness. He leaped to Serku's side.

"I go with you," I heard. "Some little I can tell you." They were gone.

"Fine work!" muttered Larry. "Nominated for a citizen of Ireland when we get out of this, one Rador of—"

The Shadow trembled, shuddered into nothingness. The obelisked outposts that had held it framed a ribbon of roadway, high banked with verdure, vanished in green distances.

And then from the portal sped a shriek, a death cry! It cut through the silence of the ebon pit like a whimpering arrow. Before it had died down the stairways came pouring the guards. Those at the threshold raised their swords and peered within. Abruptly Rador was between them. One dropped his hilt and gripped him. The green dwarf's poinard flashed and was buried in his throat. Down upon Rador's head swept the second blade.

A flame leaped from O'Keefe's hand and the sword seemd to fling itself from its wielder's grasp—another flash and the soldier crumpled. Rador threw himself into the shell, darted to the high seat, and straight between the pillars of the Shadow we flew!

There came a crackling, a shadow as of vast wings flinging down upon us. The corial's flight was checked as by a giant's hand. I was hurled forward into Olaf and O'Keefe, tumbled beneath the front whorl. The shell swerved sickeningly; there was an oddly metallic splintering; it quivered; shot ahead. Dizzily I picked myself up and looked behind.

The Shadow had fallen—but too late, a bare instant too late. And shrinking as we fled from it, still it seemed to strain like some fettered Afrit from Eblis, throbbing with wrath, seeking with every malign power it possessed to break its bonds and

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pursue. Not until long after were we to know that it had been the dying hand of Serku, groping out of oblivion, that had cast it after us as a fowler upon an escaping bird.

"Snappy work, Rador!" It was Larry speaking. "But they cut the end off your bus all right!"

I glanced back, a full quarter of the hindward whorl was gone, sliced off cleanly. Rador noted it with anxious eyes.

"That is bad," he said, "but not too bad, perhaps. We cannot tell yet. All depends upon how closely Lugur and his men can follow us."

He raised a hand to O'Keefe in salute.

"But to you, Larree, I owe my life. Not even the Keth could have been as swift to save me as was that death flame of yours, friend!"

The Irishman waved an airy hand, relapsing into his own tongue.

"You're doing your bit yourself, old thing," he remarked; Rador caught the meaning. "Fluke," Larry murmured to me. "Aimed at the beggar's head and went high. Reputation maker—the shot you never meant. What happened?" He turned again to Rador.

"Serku"—the green dwarf drew from his girdle the blood-stained poniard—"Serku I was forced to slay. Even as he raised the Shadow the globe gave the alarm. Lugur follows with twice ten times ten of his best. Serku drew his blade upon me, and I killed—" He hesitated. "Though we have escaped the Shadow it has taken toll of our swiftness. May we reach the Portal before it closes upon Lakla. But if we do not—" He paused again. "Well I know a way. But it is not one I am gay to follow. *No!*"

He snapped open the aperture that held the ball flaming within the dark crystal; peered at it anxiously. I crept to the torn end of the corial. How, I wondered, could the Shadow have first held, when shorn with such unbelievable energy. The edges were crumbling, disintegrated. They powdered in my fingers like dust. Mystified still, I crept back where Larry, sheer happiness pouring from him, was whistling softly and polishing up his automatic. His gaze fell upon Olaf's grim, sad face and softened.

"Buck up, Olaf!" he said. "We've got a good fighting chance. Once we link up with Lakla and her crowd I'm betting that we get your wife. Never doubt it! The baby—" he hesitated awkwardly. The Norseman's eyes filled; he stretched a hand to the O'Keefe.

"The *Yndling*—she is of *de Dode*," he half whispered, "of the blessed dead. For her I have no fear and for her vengeance will be given me. *Ja!* But *mine Hustru*, my Helma—she is of the dead-alive—like those we saw whirling like leaves in the light of the Shining Devil. And I would that she, too, were of *de Dode*, and at rest. I do not know how to fight the Shining Devil—no!"

His heart's bitter despair welled up in his voice.

"OLAF," Larry's voice was gentle. "We'll come out on top. I know it. And I hope, and I do believe, Olaf, that we'll get your wife out of it all right. But there's one thing you must remember. All this stuff that seems so strange and—and, well, sort of supernatural, is just a lot of tricks we're not hep to as yet. Don't fall for it, Olaf! That's what they're hoping we'll do. They want to get our nerve.

"What you call the Shining Devil isn't any devil or spook or anything of the kind. It's just something we're not used to."

The Norseman considered this; nodded gravely.

"*Ja!*" he answered at last. "At least we can fight. That is why I have turned to Thor of the battles. *Ja!* And *one* have I hope in for mine Helma—the white maiden. Since I have turned to the old gods it has been made clear to me that I shall slay Lugur and that the *Heks*, the evil witch Yolara, shall also die. But I would talk with the white maiden."

"All right," said Larry, "but just don't be afraid of what you don't understand.

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Olaf, I could lie on my back in a field in Ireland and dream in an hour more things of this sort than these people could show us in a million years! There's another thing"—he hesitated, nervously—"there's another thing that may startle you a bit when we meet up with Lakla—her—er—frogs!"

"Like the frog woman we saw on the wall?" asked Olaf.

"Yes," went on Larry, rapidly. "It's this way—I figure that the frogs grow rather large where she lives; and they're a bit different, too. Well, Lakla's got a lot of 'em trained. Carry spears and clubs and all that junk just like trained seals or monkeys or so on in the circus. Probably a custom of the place.

"Nothing queer about that, Olaf. Why, hell, people have all kinds of pets—armadillos and snakes and rabbits, kangaroos and elephants and tigers. Look what you can do with chimpanzees—make 'em almost human; even teach 'em to smoke and drink. Lakla was probably up against it for help and specialized in frogs; probably an extraordinary, intelligent frog. That's all there is to it."

Remembering how the frog-woman had stuck in Larry's mind from the outset, I wondered whether all this was not more to convince himself than Olaf.

But I listened no more, for now I was sure of my surmise. I busied myself taking note of the rapidly changing aspect of the country through which we were running. The road had begun to thrust itself through high flung, sharply pinnacled masses and rounded out-croppings of rock on which clung patches of the amber moss.

The trees had utterly vanished, and studding the moss-carpeted plains were only clumps of a willowy shrub from which hung, like grapes, clusters of white waxen blooms. The light, too, had changed; gone were the dancing, sparkling atoms and the silver had faded to a soft, almost ashen grayness. Ahead of us marched a rampart of coppery cliffs, rising like all these mountainous walls we had seen, into the immensities of haze.

Something long drifting in my subconsciousness turned to startled realization. The speed of the shell was slackening! The aperture containing the ionizing mechanism was still open; I glanced within. The whirling ball of fire was not dimmed, but its coruscations, instead of pouring down through the cylinder, swirled and eddied and shot back as though trying to re-enter their source. Rador nodded grimly.

"The Shadow takes its toll," he said.

We topped a rise. Larry gripped my arm.

"Look!" he cried, and pointed. Far, far behind us, so far that the road was but a glistening thread, a score of shining points came speeding.

"Lugur and his men," said Rador.

"Can't you step on her?" asked Larry.

"Step on her?" repeated the green dwarf, puzzled.

"Give her more speed; push her," explained O'Keefe.

Rador looked about him. The coppery ramparts were close, not more than five of our miles distant; in front of us the plain lifted in a long rolling swell, and up this the corial essayed to go with a terrifying lessening of speed. Faintly behind us came shoutings, and we knew that Lugur drew close. Nor anywhere was there sign of Lakla nor her frog-men—the Akka.

NOW we were half-way to the crest; the shell barely crawled and from beneath it came a faint hissing. It quivered and I knew that its base was no longer held above the glassy surface, but rested on it.

"One last chance!" exclaimed Rador. He pressed upon the control lever and wrenched it from its socket. Instantly the sparkling ball expanded, whirling with prodigious rapidity and sending a cascade of coruscations into the cylinder. The shell rose; leaped through the air; the dark crystal split into fragments; the fiery ball dulled; died. But upon the impetus of that last thrust we reached the crest. Poised there for a moment I caught a glimpse of the road dropping down the

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side of an enormous moss-covered bowl-shaped valley whose sharply curved sides ended abruptly at the base of the towering barrier.

Then down the steep, hissing over the obsidian, powerless to guide or to check the shell we plunged in a meteor rush straight for the annihilating adamantine breasts of the cliffs!

Now the quick thinking of Larry's air training came to our aid. As the rampart reared close to us he threw himself upon Rador; hurled him and himself against the side of the flying whorl. Under the shock the finely balanced machine, almost floating in air through its projectile speed, swerved from its course. It struck the soft, low bank of the road, shot high in air, bounded on through the thick carpeting, whirled like a dervish and fell upon its side. Shot from it, we rolled for yards but the moss saved broken bones or serious bruises.

"Quick!" cried the green dwarf. He seized an arm, dragged me to my feet, began running to the cliff base not a hundred feet away. Beside us raced O'Keefe and Olaf. At our left was the black road. It stopped abruptly, was cut off by a slab of polished crimson stone a hundred feet high, and as wide, set within the coppery face of the barrier. On each side of it stood pillars, cut from the living rock and immense, almost, as those which held the rainbow veil of the Dweller. Across its face weaved unnameable carvings, but I had no time for more than a glance. The green dwarf gripped my arm again.

"Quick!" he cried again. "The hand-maiden has passed!"

At the right of the Portal ran a low wall of shattered rock. Over this we raced like rabbits. Hidden behind it was a narrow path. Crouching, Rador in the lead, we sped along it; three hundred, four hundred yards we raced—and the path ended in a *cul de sac!* To our ears was borne a louder shouting. O'Keefe peered over the wall.

"Here they come," he announced.

The first of the pursuing shells had swept over the lip of the great bowl, poised for a moment as we had and then, and *not* as we had, began a cautious descent. Within it, scanning the slopes, I saw Lugur.

"A little closer and I'll get him!" whispered Larry viciously. He raised his pistol.

His hand was caught in a mighty grip; Rador, eyes blazing, stood beside him.

"No!" rasped the green dwarf. He heaved a shoulder against one of the boulders that formed the pocket. It rocked aside, revealing a slit of an entrance.

"In!" ordered he, straining against the weight of the stone. O'Keefe, weapon in hand, slipped through, Olaf at his back, I following. With a lightning leap the green dwarf was beside me, the huge rock missing him by a hairbreadth as it swung into place!

We were in Cimmerian darkness. I felt for my pocket-flash and recalled with distress that I had left it behind with my medicine kit when we fled from the gardens. But Rador seemed to need no light.

"Grip hands!" he ordered. A palm shot into mine.

"It's me, professor," laughed O'Keefe. A great paw touched my side, fell into my other hand, and I knew this for Olaf's. We crept, single file, holding to each other like children, through the black. At last the green dwarf paused.

"Await me here," he whispered. "Do not move. And for your lives—be silent!"

And he was gone.

CHAPTER XXVII

DRAGON WORM AND MOSS DEATH

FOR a small eternity—to me at least—we waited. Then as silent as ever the green dwarf returned.

"It is well," he said, some of the strain gone from his voice. "Grip hands again, and follow."

"Wait a bit, Rador." This was Larry. "If Lugur's going to follow us in here, why not let Olaf and me go back to the

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opening and pick them off as they come in? We could hold the lot, and in the meantime you and Goodwin could go after Lakla for help."

"Lugur knows the secret of the Portal, if he dares use it," answered the captain, with a curious indirection. "And now that they have challenged the Silent Ones I think he *will* dare. Also he will find our tracks, and it may be that he knows this hidden way."

"Well, for Heaven's sake!" O'Keefe's appalled bewilderment was almost ludicrous. "If he knows all that, and you knew all that, why didn't you let me click him when I had the chance?"

"Larree," the green dwarf was grave and oddly humble. "It seemed good to me, too—at first. And then I heard a command, heard it clearly, to stop you—that Lugur die not now, lest a greater vengeance fail!"

"Command? From whom?" The Irishman's voice distilled out of the blackness the very essence of bewilderment.

"I thought," Rador was whispering, "that it came from the Silent Ones!"

"Superstition!" groaned O'Keefe in utter exasperation. "Always superstition! What can you do against it!

"Never mind, Rador." His sense of humor came to his aid. "It's too late now anyway. Where do we go from here, old dear?" he laughed.

"We tread the path of one I am not fain to meet," answered Rador. "But if meet we must, point the death tubes at the pale shield he bears upon his throat and send the flame into the flower of cold fire that is its center—nor look into his eyes!"

Again Larry gasped, and I with him.

"It's getting too deep for me, Doc," he muttered, dejectedly. "Can you make head or tail of it?"

"No," I answered, shortly enough, "but Rador fears something and that's his description of it."

"Sure," he replied, "only it's a code I don't understand." I could feel his grin. "All right for the flower of cold fire, Rador, and I won't look into his eyes," he went on cheerfully. "But hadn't we better be moving?"

"Come!" said the soldier; again hand in hand we went blindly on.

O'Keefe was muttering to himself.

"Flower of cold fire! Don't look into his eyes! Some joint! A lot of superstition." Then he caroled, softly:

"Oh, mama, pin a cold rose on me;
Two young frogmen are in love with me;
Shut my eyes so I can't see."

"Sh!" Rador was warning; he began whispering. "Lugur for a little time will be perplexed. He will not open the Portal until he must. They will find the corial and search. They will follow our tracks. Beyond the moving stone is naught but bare rock; there will be no tracks there but neither will there be hiding place. They will seek the entrance and they will find it. Then Lugur will send after us there a force of his men and with his others will pass through the Portal to beat for us.

"For half a *va* we go along a way of death. From its peril we pass into another against whose dangers I can guard you. But in parts this is in view of the roadway and it may be that Lugur will see us. If so we must fight as best we can. If we pass these two roads safely, then is the way to the Crimson Sea clear nor need we fear Lugur nor any. And there is another thing that Lugur does not know. When he opens the Portal the Silent Ones will hear and Lakla and the Akka will be swift to greet its opener.

"Rador," I asked, "how know you all this?"

"The handmaiden is my own sister's child," he answered, quietly.

O'Keefe drew a long breath.

"Uncle," he remarked casually in English, "meet the man who's going to be your nephew!" And thereafter, except in grave moments he never addressed the green dwarf except by the avuncular title, which Rador, humorously enough, apparently conceived to be one of respectful endearment.

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For me a light broke. Plain now was the reason for his fore-knowledge of Lakla's appearance at the feast where Larry had so narrowly escaped Yolara's spells. Plain indeed the determining factor that had cast his lot with ours, and my confidence despite his discourse of mysterious perils, experienced a remarkable quickening.

Speculation as to the marked differences in pigmentation and appearance of niece and uncle was dissipated by my consciousness that we were now moving in a dim half light.

We were in a fairly wide tunnel. Not far ahead the gleam filtered, pale yellow like sunlight sifting through the leaves of autumn poplars. And as we drew closer to its source I saw that it did indeed pass through a leafy screen hanging over the passage end. This Rador drew aside cautiously, beckoned us and we stepped through.

At first thought it appeared to be a tunnel cut through soft green mold. Its base was a flat strip of pathway a yard wide from which the walls curved out in perfect cylindrical form, smoothed and evened with utmost nicety. Thirty feet wide they were at their widest, then drew toward each other with no break in their symmetry; they did not close. Above was, roughly, a ten-foot rift, ragged edged, through which poured light like that in the heart of pale amber, a buttercup light shot through with curiously evanescent bronze shadows.

Under the feet the path gave with a resiliency like hard rubber or well-rolled turf.

It was ridged—rippled—these ripples a foot apart and flanked by deep, sharp indentations, clean cut as though drilled. Just such a tunnel, it came to me, as would be made by a huge metal ball belted with a long, toothed strip and sent rolling with terrific force through some compressible material such as, for instance, some types of moss.

"Quick!" commanded Rador, uneasily, and set off at a sharp pace.

MOSS. Why had that image come to me? Ah, so that was why! For now, my eyes becoming more accustomed to the strange light, I saw that the tunnel's walls *were* of moss.

"Hurry!" It was Rador calling. I had lagged behind and reluctantly I turned my mind from those tempting walls, luring me to stop and study them; whose spell, indeed, already had slowed my pace. Hurriedly I rejoined the others; resolutely I kept my eyes at my feet, maintaining my place in the file.

And down the corridor swept ever tiny gusts, overladen with unfamiliar, oddly fragrant odors; some so pronounced as to produce a trifle of light-headedness. Almost as though surcharged with oxygen.

Rador quickened the pace to a half-run; we were climbing; panting. The tunnel was no longer straight; it was—sinuous. Dispossessing the picture of the rolling ball came another of a long, flexible cylinder being forced through the luxuriant growth. The amber light grew stronger; the rift above us wider. The tunnel curved; on the left a narrow cleft appeared. The green dwarf leaped toward it, thrust us within, pushed us ahead of him up a steep rocky fissure—well nigh, indeed, a chimney. Up and up this we scrambled until my lungs were bursting and I thought I could climb no more. The crevice ended; we crawled out and sank, even Rador, upon a little, leaf-carpeted clearing circled by lacy tree-ferns.

Gasping, legs aching, we lay prone, relaxed, drawing back strength and breath. Rador was first to rise. Thrice he bent low as in homage, then—

"Give thinks to the Ancient Ones, for their power has been over us!" he exclaimed.

Dimly I wondered what he meant. Something about the fern leaf at which I had been staring aroused me. I leaped to my feet and ran to its base. This was no fern, no! It was fern moss! The largest of its species I had ever found in tropic jungles had not been more than two inches high, and this was—twenty feet! The

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scientific fire I had experienced in the tunnel returned uncontrollable. I parted the fronds, gazed out, froze with sheer wonder.

My outlook commanded a vista of miles—and that vista! A Fata Morgana of plantdom! A Scheherazade's garden of enchantment! A land of flowered sorcery!

Forests of tree-high mosses spangled over with blooms of every conceivable shape and color. Cataracts and clusters, avalanches and nets of blossoms in pastels, in dulled metallics, in gorgeous flamboyant hues. Some of them phosphorescent and shining like living jewels; some sparkling as though with dust of opals, of sapphires, of rubies and topazes and emeralds. Thickets of convolvuli like the trumpets of the seven arch-angels of Mara, king of illusion, which are shaped from the bows of splendors arching his highest heaven!

And moss veils like banners of a marching host of Titans; pennons and bannerets of the sunset; gonfalons of the jinn; webs of faery; oriflammes of elfland!

Springing up through that polychromatic flood of myriads of pedicles—slender and straight as spears, or soaring in spirals, or curving with undulations gracile as the white serpents of Tanit in ancient Carthaginian groves. And all surmounted by a fantasie of spore cases in shapes of minaret and turret, domes and spires and cones, caps of Phrygia and bishops' miters, shapes grotesque and unnameable. Shapes that were delicate and lovely!

As I gazed, breath strangled with awe, a sound began to come to us, reaching out like the first faint susurrus of the incoming tide; sighing, sighing, growing stronger. Now its mournful whispering quivered all about us, shook us. Then passing like a Presence, it died away in far distances.

"The Portal!" said Rador. "Lugur has entered!"

He, too, parted the fronds and peered back along our path.

And then—

"Holy St. Brigid!" gasped Larry.

From the rift in the tunnel's continuation, nigh a mile beyond the cleft through which we had fled, lifted a crown of horns—of tentacles—erect, alert, of mottled gold and crimson. It lifted higher, and from a monstrous scarlet head beneath them blazed two enormous, opaque eyes, their depths wells of purplish phosphorescence. Higher still—noiseless, earless, chinless; a livid, worm mouth from which a slender scarlet tongue leaped like playing flames!

Slowly it rose, its mighty neck cuirassed with gold and scarlet scales from whose polished surfaces the amber light glinted like flakes of fire. And under this neck shimmered something like a palely luminous silvery shield, guarding it. More and more it drew into sight as the head of horror mounted. And in the shield's center, full ten feet across, glowing, flickering, pulsating, shining out coldly, was a rose of white flame. A "flower of cold fire" even as Rador had said.

NOW swiftly the Thing upreared, standing like a scaled tower a hundred feet above the rift, its eyes scanning that movement I had seen along the course of its lair. There was a hissing; the crown of horns fell, whipped and writhed like the tentacles of an octopus; the towering length dropped back.

"Quick!" gasped Rador and through the fern moss, along the path and down the other side of the steep we raced.

Behind us for an instant there was a rushing as of a torrent; a far-away, faint, agonized screaming—silence!

"No fear *now* from those who followed," whispered the green dwarf, pausing.

"Sainted St. Patrick!" O'Keefe gazed ruminatively at his automatic. "An' he expected me to kill *that* with *this*. Well, as Fergus O'Connor said when they sent him out to slaughter a wild bull with a potato knife: 'Ye'll niver rayilize how I appreciate the confidence ye show in me!"

"The dragon worm!" Rador said.

"It was *Helvede Orm*—the hell worm!" groaned Olaf.

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"There you go again—" blazed Larry. But the green dwarf was hurrying down the path and swiftly we followed.

The scene in front of us was oddly weird and depressing; in some indefinable way—dreadful.

The curious mossy fringe were like distorted images of dog and deerlike forms, of birds—of *dwarfs* and here and there the simulacra of the giant frogs! Spore cases, yellowish green, as large as miters and much resembling them in shape, protruded from the heaps. My repulsion grew.

Rador turned to us a face whiter far than that with which he had looked upon the dragon worm.

"Now for your lives," he whispered, "tread softly here as I do, and speak not at all!"

He stepped forward on tiptoe, slowly, with utmost caution. We crept after him; passed the heaps beside the path. And as I passed my skin crept and I shrank and saw the others shrink, too, with that unnameable loathing. Nor did the green dwarf pause until he had reached the brow of a small hillock a hundred yards beyond. And *he* was trembling.

"Now what the devil are we up against?" muttered O'Keefe.

The green dwarf stretched a hand; stiffened; gazed over to the left of us beyond a lower hillock upon whose broad crest lay a file of the moss shapes. They fringed it, their miters having a grotesque appearance of watching what lay below. And now I saw that the glistening road lay below—and from it came a shout! A dozen of the coria were there, filled with Lugur's men and in one of them Lugur himself, laughing wickedly.

There was a rush of soldiers and up the low hillock raced a score of them toward us.

"Run!" shouted Rador.

"Not much!" grunted O'Keefe—and took swift aim at Lugur. The automatic spat; Olaf's echoed. Both bullets went wide, for Lugur, still laughing, threw himself into the protection of the body of his shell. But following the shots, from the file of moss heaps came a series of muffled explosions. Under the pistols' concussions the mitered caps had burst and instantly all about the running soldiers grew a cloud of tiny, glistening white spores, like a little cloud of puff-ball dust many times magnified. Through this cloud I glimpsed their faces, stricken with an agony I could not fathom.

Some turned to fly, but before they could take a second step stood rigid.

The spore cloud drifted and eddied about them; rained down on their heads and half bare breasts, covered their garments—and swiftly they began to change! Their features grew indistinct, merged! The glistening white spores that covered them turned to a pale yellow, grew greenish, spread and swelled, darkened. The eyes of one of the soldiers glinted for a moment, and then were covered by the swift growth!

Where but a few moments before had been men were only grotesque heaps, swiftly melting, swiftly rounding into the semblance of the mounds that lay behind us—and already beginning to take on their gleam of ancient viridescence!

The Irishman was gripping my arm fiercely; the pain brought me back to my senses.

"Olaf's right," he gasped. "This *is* hell! I'm sick."

Lugur and his companions awakened from their nightmare; piled into the coria, wheeled, raced away.

"On!" said Rador thickly. "Two perils have we passed. The Silent Ones watch over us!"

SOON we were again among the familiar and so unfamiliar moss giants. I knew what I had seen and this time Larry could not call me superstitious. In the jungles of Borneo I had examined that other swiftly developing fungus which wreaks the vengeance of some of the hill tribes upon those who steal their women; gripping with its microscopic hooks into the flesh; sending quick, tiny rootlets through the skin down into the capillaries,

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sucking life and thriving and never to be torn away until the living thing it clings to has been sapped dry.

Here was but another of the species in which the development's rate was incredibly accelerated.

Rador stopped. In front of us was again the road ribbon.

"Now is all danger passed," he said. "The way lies open and Lugur has deliberately fled—"

There was a flash from the road. It passed me like a little lariat of light. It struck Larry squarely between the eyes, spread over his face and drew itself within!

"Down!" cried Rador, and hurled me to the ground. My head struck sharply; I felt myself grow faint; Olaf fell beside me. I saw the green dwarf draw down the O'Keefe; he collapsed limply, face still, eyes staring. A shout, and from the roadway poured a host of Lugur's men.

There came a rush of little feet. Soft, fragrant draperies brushed my face. Dimly I watched Lakla bend over the Irishman.

She straightened, her arms swept out and the writhing vine, with its tendriled heads of ruby bloom, five flames of misty incandescence, leaped into the face of the soldiers now close upon us. It darted at their throats, striking, coiling, and striking again; coiling and uncoiling with incredible rapidity and flying from leverage points of throats, of faces, of breasts like a great green spring endowed with consciousness, volition and hatred. And those it struck stood rigid with faces masks of inhuman fear and anguish; and those still unstriken fled.

Another rush of feet, and down upon Lugur's forces poured the frog-men, their booming giant leading, thrusting with their lances, tearing and rending with talons and fangs and spurs.

Against that onrush the dwarfs could not stand. They raced for the shells; I heard Lugur shouting, menacingly. And then Lakla's voice, pealing like a golden bugle of wrath:

"Go, Lugur!" she cried. "Go, that you and Yolara and your Shining One may die together! Death for you, Lugur. Death for you all! Remember Lugur—death!"

There was a great noise within my head —no matter, Lakla was here. Lakla, here —but too late. Lugur had outplayed us; moss death nor dragon worm had frightened him away. He had crept back to trap us. Lakla had come too late. Larry was dead— Larry! But I had heard no banshee wailing, and Larry had said he could not die without that warning. No, Larry was not dead.

A horny arm lifted me; two enormous, oddly gentle saucer eyes were staring into mine; my head rolled; I caught a glimpse of Lakla kneeling beside the O'Keefe.

The noise in my head grew thunderous, was carrying me away on its thunder— swept me into soft, blind darkness.

TO BE CONTINUED

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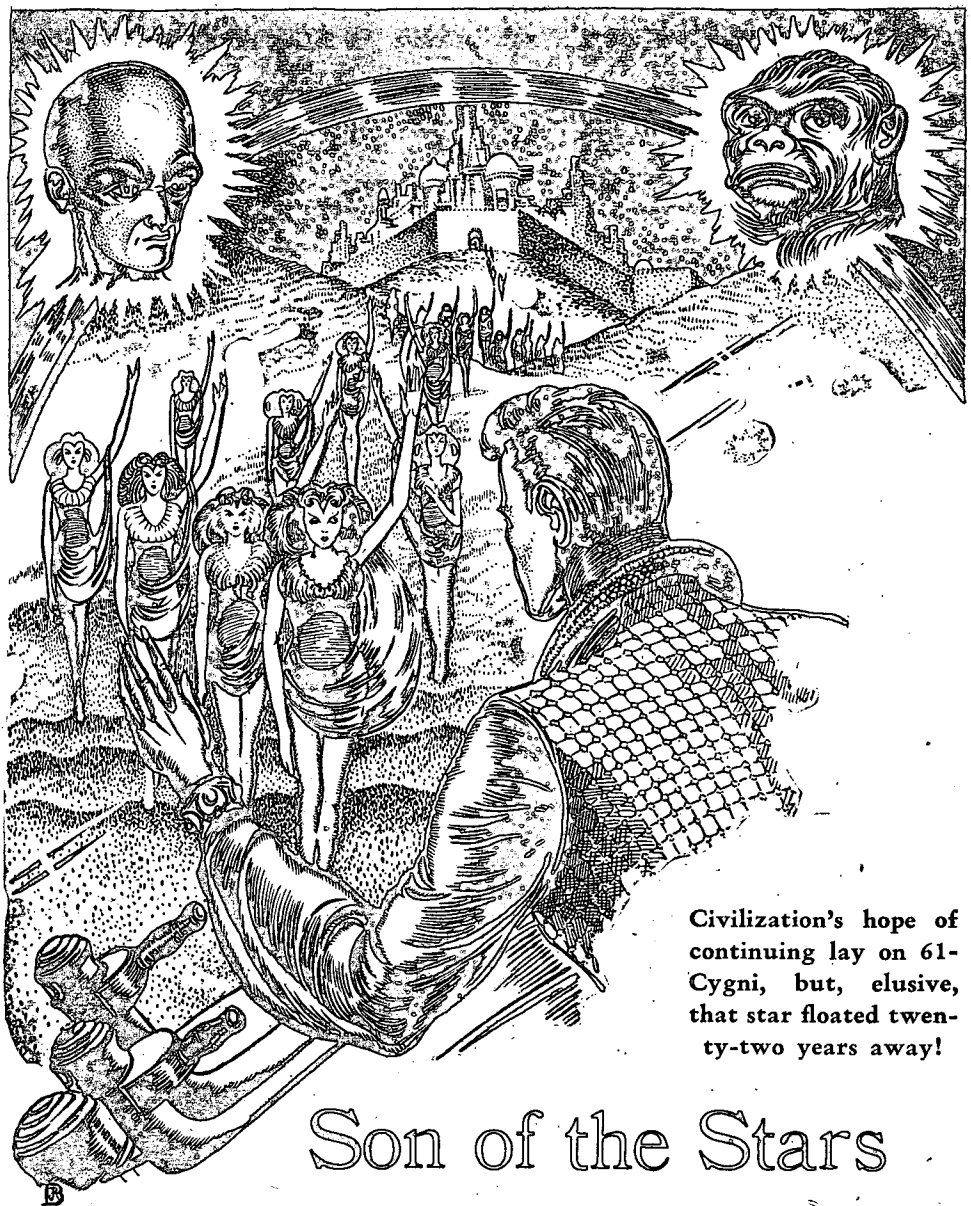

Civilization's hope of continuing lay on 61-Cygni, but, elusive, that star floated twenty-two years away!

Son of the Stars

By EANDO BINDER

DAVE STANDISH looked down at the body of the old, silvery-haired scientist, and realized that he was all alone now.

More alone than any other human being had ever been!

For their ship was out in a space that knew the sun only as a dim, yellow star, no brighter than the other stars. For almost seventeen years, he and Dr. Roscoe had hurtled away from the Solar System, on the strangest mission in man's history.

The young man stepped away from the body after a moment, quietly. He left

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the large main cabin and made his effortless way down a corridor to the nearest port-window. He stared out into the void. The immovable stars did not show that that ship was plunging through space at half the speed of light.

Dave Standish was not quite twenty-one years old. For the last seventeen of those years, he had seen the same changeless vista of star-spotted emptiness that he now viewed. How many countless times in the past, with nose pressed flat against the flawless quartz plate, his childish eyes and wondering mind had struggled to grasp the meaning of this abysm around the ship!

As a child of eight he had stood at this same port-window, certain that he was the center of the universe.

This had been the only world he had really known.

He had memories of that other world in which he had lived to the age of four, but it was a dream world. A strange, fairyland world in which you walked around in a ship so big that you could not see the ceiling. And there had been an enormous, brilliant lamp up high that they moved over your head.

When they had hidden this big lamp under the floor at bedtimes, the big cabin had become dark. No, not always dark, he remembered. Sometimes they had hung out another, softer lamp, one with a curious face on it. They had called it the Moon-light. The bright one was the Sun-light. And then there had been the Star-lights, too, at night, such as he could see from this smaller cabin.

But that was a dream-world, faded in memory. This smaller cabin, surrounded only by Star-lights, was real. This had been the child Dave Standish's world for years, and he had not questioned its existence or reason. No more than a child of eight on Earth would have questioned the existence of Earth, or his life on it. He had asked questions, of course, but they had been idle ones of purely childish curiosity. But after the age of eight, deeper questions rose in his mind.

The chronometer in the main cabin had clicked on steadily. The hours grew into days, the days into years. A twelve year old Dave Standish had stood before this same port-window and suddenly realized that a ship was something that went somewhere. Dr. Roscoe, in the rôle of teacher, had begun on the history and geography of Earth, and the groundwork of science.

Dave Standish slowly realized that the other "ship" had been something more than a ship. It took him many, many months of thoughtful reasoning to finally accept the truth. The other "ship" had been a large world, tremendously larger and more complex in all its phases than he was able to conceive at first! He realized the Star-lights were no longer little lamps hung just around the ship. They were big, blazing suns scattered far and wide!

And their ship was not hanging motionlessly. It was moving among these suns—

THE grown-up Dave Standish, thinking and staring out at the stars, could still remember the thrill of his sixteenth birthday. On that day Dr. Roscoe had darkened the cabin and given him his first taste of talking and moving pictures. They became an important part of Dave's life in the next few years.

Once he had run through the hundreds of reels there were, he re-ran them again and again. His narrow, iron-bound world peopled itself with fantoms that became almost real as he viewed them over and over.

Almost but not quite. It was a strange, new world to Dave Standish, one before which there was always a cloud. He would never understand it fully till he saw it with his own eyes. He sighed when he thought of the remoteness of that event.

That it was a stupendous journey they were on, Dave Standish had come to realize, as his practical knowledge increased. At first he had taken it for granted. But now he realized what powerful engines the ship had, to achieve half the speed of light. The builders had had to design an

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engine and ship to carry two passengers almost twenty thousand times as far as the distance from Earth to Pluto.

This entailed a proportionate increase of fuel and food, to last for almost a half century. In the earthly scale of monetary value, the ship was as costly as a small war. Certainly the motive behind its launching must be gravely important, he had reflected many times. The entire project was for getting him, Dave Standish, to some destination and back. Everything had been planned to the last detail for that end.

To what detail Dave only realized when Dr. Roscoe told him he had been chosen, for perfect health and strong mind, from thousands of other children. And before he had been put aboard the ship, doctors had given him a mild attack of each of the childhood diseases, for the purpose of filling his blood with the natural antibodies. Every precaution had been taken to increase his chances of surviving the long trip into the void.

But just why the trip, and where were they going? That had been the great mystery. On his twenty-first birthday, Dave Standish was to be told.

But before that time came, Dr. Roscoe had a siege of weakness and sank fast. He grew gaunt and thin. He had always shunned the port-windows. His staring eyes seemed ever to have a lurking terror in them. He did not like to look out into abysmal space.

Dave, bringing his thoughts now to the recent past, was not quite sure what Dr. Roscoe had died from. He had been fairly young, not more than fifty, and exceptionally vigorous in health, at the start. He too had been chosen carefully. Something more in this stupendous trip than advancing senility had brought him to his death-bed.

He had been more or less in a delirium for the past week. For hours at a time he had babbled to the younger man about Earth. It seemed to give him a sad pleasure to tell of moonlit nights, and the gentle breezes of spring, of laughter, and crowds, cities, and sun-drenched countrysides.

Dave had listened attentively, faintly stirred. But he didn't really understand. He was no part of that world.

Then, in the last hour, the old scientist's mind had cleared. He had taken the boy's hand in a bony clasp and whispered hoarsely, with a queer, terrified light in his sunken eyes.

"I will never see Earth again!" he had said. "The void has taken its toll. It has shattered my mind! You have no fear of the abysses of space, have you, Dave? You couldn't have—it's your world, the only one you really know. Thank God for that!"

Dave had not understood more than the bare words. He saw nothing about space to frighten one. Dr. Roscoe had gone on, fighting off the death rattle in his throat.

"I must reveal to you, before I go, the destination and purpose of this trip. It is something I've delayed telling you because your mind was not fully matured —not fully prepared to understand. I had hoped to be with you longer."

He had waved limply with his thin hand, bitter lines etched in his old face. Eyes burning, he had spoken on:

"Our ship is heading for the binary star 61-Cygni, in the Constellation Cygnus, The Swan. It is eleven light-years from Earth. Sixty-six trillions of miles—if you can conceive such a number and distance. At our velocity of half the light speed, it is a trip of twenty-two years! Five years from now, when you are twenty-six, you will reach 61-Cygni."

Dave had not been too surprised at the revelation of their destination. With his astronomical knowledge, he had already suspected their goal. He nodded silently, as Dr. Roscoe resumed:

"You will land on one of 61-Cygni's planets, for a purpose greater than any before, in the history of the human race!"

A deeply tragic look had come into the scientist's face. His voice croaked on in almost defeated tones.

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"You remember, from your history lessons, that after the Second World War of 1939—a century ago—a world state was formed. A supreme ruling body was elected. They were scientists as well as statesmen. Under their leadership, the world and science forged ahead rapidly.

"Then disaster came! All sciences had advanced, but particularly biology. Drunk with a certain vital discovery, a group of biologists brought a doom to mankind. Doom!"

DR. ROSCOE'S voice had choked. His eyes had reflected a deep agony. Dave stood before him bewildered, vaguely aware of some grave problem eating like an acid in the scientist's soul. He had recovered himself and gone on in a bare whisper.

"They radiated artificial cosmic-rays all over Earth, in order to speed up mutational evolution. It was planned that all humanity at once, in one or two generations, would mutate to a higher level. A year later they examined the new crop of babies eagerly. And then it was seen that something had gone wrong!"

A living horror came over the scientist's haggard features. He clenched his bony hands tightly.

"Of the first group of babies, half were normal—the same as before. But half the remaining were mutations insane at birth, and the rest were atavists—throwbacks to the subman! Man's tampering with the normal course of evolution had resulted in catastrophe. It was too-easily calculated that in less than a century, there would be only the two mutations left—large-headed insane creatures and the ugly, half-apelike submen!

"They realized it must be stopped, this terrible misdirection of evolution. First of all, the two mutations were killed off as fast as they were born. But then the ghastly truth became known. The cosmic-ray process had destroyed an important, delicate hormone in every living soul on Earth. Without this hormone, the mutations could not be checked. Worst of all, the biologists did not know its chemical composition!"

Dr. Roscoe had leaned back for a moment, exhausted by his emotional strain. Then he went on weakly.

"You knew nothing of this, Dave. You were too young. You are one of the last of the normal babies born on Earth in the past fifty years. If this mission fails—"

The scientist broke off and began again.

"Realizing the doom, the biologists tried to undo their evil. But there seemed no salvation in Earthly science. They could not determine the complicated chemical molecule which no longer existed on Earth. Finally it was decided that the last hope must lie away from Earth, away from the solar system. Perhaps among the nearer stars might be found an answer to the problem. It was, and is, a forlorn hope. But no possibility could be left untried.

"61-Cygni is the only star within reach with planets. Every scrap of Earth's radium went into this ship's engines. Therefore on us—on *you,* Dave—depends the entire fate of the human race!"

Dr. Roscoe's voice had become very weak then.

"I have written out very carefully what you must do when you reach 61-Cygni. Your return to Earth, supposing all is successful, will be just in time to forestall the inevitable end. Atavism and false mutation."

His voice became suddenly anxious.

"Do you understand, my boy? Sometimes you have stared at me so blankly. Perhaps it was a mistake to take you from Earth at the age of four. It was thought best to take one at that age, so that his young mind might be easily molded into the harsh mental rigors of a lifetime of space travel. You will return to Earth a man of forty-eight! But on the other hand, you have no real conception of life on Earth, or of the grave importance of this mission."

His thin voice rose almost to a shriek.

"But you *must* understand, Dave!"

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"I will do everything as you have told me," Dave had promised emotionlessly.

"My spirit will be with you, my boy!"

These were the last sane words Dr. Roscoe had spoken. His mind snapped then. A few minutes later, babbling endlessly of the things of Earth, he had fallen into the final coma, never to awaken.

Following instructions, Dave shoved the body out of the air-lock, out of the ship.

FOR five more years the super-ship plummeted into the void.

All things save his own existence became like a dream to Dave. He was not lonesome in the true sense of the word. He did miss Dr. Roscoe for a time, but had no terror of being alone in the yawning space that would have driven any other human being to utter insanity. He methodically ate, slept, read scientific books, inspected the air and heat meters, and had little sense of time passing.

He noticed the arrival of Dec. 26th on the automatic calendar, and remembered that Dr. Roscoe had attached some particular significance to that date. But to Dave Standish, son of the stars, it meant nothing. He ran what few of the movie films were not already worn out, for diversion, till they, too, were useless. His main interest in those five years was to look out at the stars, hours on end.

Dave Standish had never read a book of fiction. He had never, since the age of four, seen another human being outside of Dr. Roscoe. Had never seen the workings of a mind similar to his own. Had never felt a wind on his face, a laugh in his ears, a kiss on his cheek. Had never pondered his place in a society of many others, or read a newspaper or heard a radio. Had never experienced the full emotions of fear, hate, love, anger, pity or happiness.

The mind of Dave Standish was a world of its own.

But it was a mind admirably suited to its task, as cold and unformed as space itself. And by that token, as stable.

A month before he was twenty-six years old, he sat himself at the pilot board and brought the mighty atomic-engines to roaring life. The ship had previously been turned around so that its rocket-side pointed toward 61-Cygni. Long streamers of flame shot ahead of the ship and drifted past the port-windows. The universe seemed on fire.

Dave was soon annoyed with the steady rumble and throb of the rockets. He had liked the perfect silence of space better. However, there was no choice. For six months the rockets belched their braking energies, slowing the ship down from its titanic velocity of ninety-three thousand miles a second.

When five months of deceleration had passed, 61-Cygni grew rapidly brighter till it was the most brilliant star in the firmament. After a time it bulged out at the two sides, to his eyes, and eventually split into two separate components. One was a huge red sun, the other a smaller yellow one. When the latter, which was nearer, began to display a disk, the planets appeared.

The ship had now come to a full stop and Dave Standish turned off the rockets. He made rapid calculations and found the outermost planet was five billion miles from the yellow sun, a cold airless body.

He turned the ship by offside rockets and blasted closer to the yellow sun. Another planet appeared, still two billion miles from its primary, also frozen and sure to be utterly lifeless by all earthly standards. The ship passed five more planets, two ringed like Saturn, and finally reached a position about one hundred million miles from the central sun.

Dave took up a planetary orbit. He was following instructions left by Dr. Roscoe. In a narrow zone between eighty-five million and one hundred and ten million miles must be found a planet, if there were one. If it were further out, it would be comparable to Mars, and would probably be as desiccated and deserted of life. If it were closer, it would be a steamy planet like Venus, no fit abode for higher evolutionary life.

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On that one chance—a planet in the right orbit—rested the hopes of accomplishing the mission for which the giant ship had been sent sixty-six trillion miles through the gulfs of space.

Dave Standish felt no particular emotion when he finally did sight a planet in an orbit one hundred and five million miles from the yellow sun. He suspected that if Dr. Roscoe had been living, he would have gone wild with joy. But Dave himself felt little beyond a certain scientific satisfaction.

The planet grew in size as he laid a direct course for it. It soon appeared as a large, greenish ball surrounded by a hazy, white atmosphere. It stirred a deep memory within Dave, though he did not know quite why. He eased the ship into the atmosphere and took up an orbital course in what would be its stratosphere.

AFTER circling the globe twice and seeing definite signs of civilization below, he lowered the ship toward the largest of what must be cities. But it was a fantastic city that his ship hovered over finally—strange and beautiful. It covered hundreds of square miles of territory along a sea-coast and shone green with the great areas of park-like spaces in its confines. The low, widely-separated buildings were all of iridescent stone, magnificently architectured, and perforated with endless rows of windows into which warm sunshine poured. There was no smoke or grime in this wonderful city.

Dave increased the drumming of his rockets and turned the pancake ship flat side down, lowering away carefully. He landed in a wide meadow-land just outside the city limits, with a cushioned jar that was taken up mainly by the system of pneumatic landing skids. Then he turned off the engines that had performed such prodigious labors, and ran to the nearest port-window.

For an hour he gazed out, lost in a staring trance.

For the first time in twenty-two years, he was on a world. Vague memories stirred in him, memories of a long eternity ago when as a tiny child he had lived on such a world. But his best imagination had never pictured for his adult mind what a world was really like.

He felt utterly bewildered. He could scarcely believe that there could be a stretch of unmetallic matter reaching to all the horizons, as his eyes saw.

And sunlight—what an amazing thing that was! The whole sky was filled with its blazing light, hiding the stars. For a moment Dave was frightened, for the stars had been his companions almost all his life.

It was all like a dream to Dave Standish, after the landing. And yet it was a vivid dream, much more so than that other faded dream of Earth.

Soon a line of human-like figures appeared from the city and came up to the ship. They were so startlingly like himself that Dave gasped in astonishment. They had delicate pointed ears, narrow mouths, long greenish hair, and rather long arms and legs, but outside of those things were essentially human.

The beings stopped before the ship and stared in obvious amazement, talking excitedly to one another. Then they spied Dave's face at the port-window and waved for him to come out. He instinctively understood the gesture.

Dave stepped out.

He took his first breath of pungent air that did not come from a tank, and it made him dizzy, like wine. He felt a breeze on his skin and a tingling went through his whole body. He stooped to the ground and picked up a handful of dirt and grass, letting it trickle through his fingers. He did not know why, but a saltiness stung his eyes.

Then he noticed that the people had crowded around him, staring open-mouthed. Dave stared back just as avidly, wondering how there could be so many different faces and yet all essentially alike. They were dressed in colorful, flowing robes. Finally a tall being stepped forward and spoke. The sound of the voice was

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pleasant and soprano, but the words were quite incomprehensible to Dave.

With a shock that swept all through his body, Dave was suddenly aware that this creature was a woman! Furthermore, most of the crowd round about were women. They were all tall. There were some men, but they were shorter and hung back as though quite timid.

And then Dave's eyes struck the face of one certain girl near him, and a new sensation went through him. Not quite a new sensation, for he had felt the same warm throbbing when viewing a girl in a movie-reel, years and years ago in the ship. Only now the sensation was intensified—almost overpowering.

Though he did not know it, Dave Standish stood there pouring out his whole soul into the eyes of that girl. They were laughing, violet eyes. On Earth, it would have been known as "wearing his heart on his sleeve."

The effect on the crowd was almost electrical. All the women began talking softly to one another and looking from him to the violet-eyed girl. Finally the one who had tried to speak to him went smilingly to the girl, took her hand and led her close to Dave, giving him the hand.

Dave felt a new, terrifying rapture tingle through his nerves at that contact. The hand was warm, soft, clinging. The violet eyes were close now, and in them, too, was a strange light. Dave could not realize it then, but by the custom of this matriarchal civilization, he had already been married to the violet-eyed girl, in their eyes. Their human relationships, as he was to learn, were far simpler than those of Earth. But Dave knew nothing of those things at the time. He knew only that he wanted the violet-eyed girl more than anything else in the universe.

The girl now tugged at his hand, toward the city. Dave went along, unresisting, and the two were followed by the great crowd that had come to see the ship. The crowd sang. Dave was led through their arboreal city, lit by warm sunshine and perfumed by the thousands of varieties of flowers which bordered every walk. There was no clap-trap of cars, or vehicles of any kind, nor any noise. By any earthly comparison, it was a Utopian city with laughing, happy inhabitants and simple but magnificent surroundings. It was a completely unmechanical civilization, blessed by a kind climate.

People that passed stared curiously at the strange, tall man with drab clothes, but they smiled, too. Dave found himself smiling back, though it hurt the muscles of his mouth. He had not smiled for five years, in the ship. At last the violet-eyed girl led him into a tiny house. She turned at the door to wave at the crowd and it dispersed.

When they were alone together, they looked into one another's eyes and spoke a language that made no use of words. Then the violet-eyed girl laughed, and the man from space laughed with her. She disappeared into another room to come back with a heaping bowl of strange, luscious fruits. They ate, laughing in each other's eyes.

TIME passed with the swiftness of a beautiful dream for Dave Standish. He learned their simple language quickly and soon came to know what an idyllic existence the woman-ruled civilization of this planet was. He knew a happiness, in his simple life with Tara, his wife, that he had always subconsciously hungered for.

When he tried to explain to her his presence on their world, he became confused. All that had passed before in his previous life was a forgotten dream. He even lost curiosity in the great ship in which he had come. It was still there where he had landed it, viewed daily by thousands of people of this garden planet, called Rendora.

At times, Dave would have a disturbed feeling that he should remember something in connection with the ship. It had something to do with the man who had once lived in it with him. They had come from another world, where he had been

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born, and he was supposed to go back for some reason.

Dave was quite clear in one part of his mind what it was all about, but in another part of his mind, the whole thing seemed inconsequential. What did that world mean to him, so far away in the void? He had barely lived on it a few years. Its troubles were no concern of his. He had never really been a part of that world, had never understood what its complex life was.

But Rendora was a world he *could* understand. One that he belonged in.

Daily, he went out into the fields with Tara and the others, and tilled their bountiful soil. Rendora had no severe winters and gathered harvests all through the year. At night, in the city, there was music and dancing, and gaiety and friendship and comfort. There were no wars, or struggles, no tyranny, misadjustments or poverty. Everyone had a place in this life and everyone was happy.

What could draw Dave back to a world sixty-six trillion miles away? One whose salient features had been warfare, suffering, misery and a terrible, never-understandable complexity. One part of Dave's mind knew a word called "duty," but no part of his mind could interpret that word into human terms.

One day, when he had lived almost a year on Rendora, Tara revealed a secret with a shining light in her eyes. Dave felt almost weak at the news. They awaited the event eagerly, happier than they had been before.

The day came, and Dave Standish felt as though the universe had crashed about his head when the news was delivered to him. In a blind panic, he went to see for himself. There it was, an ugly, hairy little creature with an apelike face, making little grunting sounds! Tara was weeping as though she would never stop, and avoided his eyes.

Dumfounded, unbelieving, Dave stared at his offspring. Then suddenly it came to him, like a bolt of lightning.

The doom of Earth!

How had he hoped to escape it? For he too had been bathed by that unfortunate cosmic ray process that had destroyed the regulating hormone of evolution. By the progressive Mendelian laws, which he knew to the last letter, he might have two normal babies out of ten, but the others would be like this and the insane mutants Dr. Roscoe had told him about!

This was a living symbol of the doom that faced all Earth, and in his sudden anguish, Dave realized what the doom meant to Earth people. Millions like himself, back there on Earth, had gone through this same turmoil that seemed to be tearing his soul to shreds. And millions more would, till Earth was eventually tenantless by true man entirely, populated only by vast hordes of sub-creatures and horrible mutants. That was the doom that Dr. Roscoe had tried to impress him with and which up till now, Dave had not been able to sympathize with.

Earth's mankind was doomed!

Unless—

Dave Standish suddenly sprang from his moaning wife's bedside and ran all the way to the ship, arriving half dead with fatigue. He climbed the steps and ran to the central cabin. Feverishly he pulled a notebook from what had been Dr. Roscoe's desk and read its contents. The words would have had little meaning to him an hour before. Now they did—a wonderful, glorious meaning.

Dave ran back to the city, stood himself on the steps of the central building and addressed the crowd that quickly gathered as his male voice thundered over the crowd of women. For an hour he talked and knew that the ruling matriarchs above, on the balconies, were also listening.

When he had finished, most of the crowd were weeping, and Dave knew that he would have no trouble. He shouted instructions and a great mass of them followed him to his ship. He ran to the supply rooms and hauled out crated mech-

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anisms with which he drew a pint of blood from each person. With the willing help of others, this blood was sealed into waiting cans that had been made on Earth for that purpose. Thousands of cans were filled in the next day, till there were no more left.

This life-blood of one world, given to another, would save Earth, for in it were contained traces of the subtle hormone lost to human life. The hormone that made all the difference in the universe between wild, unbridled evolution and normal life. Earth's eager chemists would isolate that hormone that had been completely destroyed on Earth through folly, and would manufacture it in huge quantities, to be given to all Earth people.

All that was in Dr. Roscoe's notebook. But he had not even known if such a planet could be found with an evolution similar to Earth's. And he had not known that Dave Standish, finding it, would not begin carrying out this project until driven to it by the finger of fate.

Dave did not waste a minute. When the cans had all been filled, sealed and stored in the ship, he prepared immediately for take-off. He was leaving Rendora, a world he would never see again, and in which he had been supremely content. He was leaving Tara, and knew that he would never again love another woman. He was leaving happiness itself. But he did not hesitate.

Tara begged to come along, no matter what the sacrifice. But Dave, with a deep wisdom, forbade it. Her mind would not stand the harshness of a trip through empty void for twenty-two years. Only he, nurtured and inured by the void already, could do it.

His ship soared up and away, glinting brightly in a yellow sunlight that would not again shine on it for twenty-two years. Rendora dwindled and Dave Standish felt as though he had left his soul behind. But within himself he felt a deep, calm satisfaction. Earth's prodigal son was returning, though he had been a son of the stars for most of his life.

TWENTY-TWO years and four months later, the giant pancake ship lowered toward Earth.

The sight of it opened a wound in Dave's heart, by its very resemblance to Rendora, the paradise he had left to fulfill his mission. Dave Standish was forty-nine years old now, his hair streaked with gray. Forty-four of those years had been spent in harsh space. Yet Dave could not feel bitter at this sacrifice of his normal life. The tremendous importance of his journey was now clear to him. That grunting, hairy little creature born to Tara—

He only hoped and prayed it wasn't too late, for Earth. The false mutation had had almost fifty years full play. Perhaps in that time humanity's numbers had been greatly depleted. They had probably maintained a rigid birth-control, to keep from spawning more and more of the undesired mutants. He would save them.

By use of an old map, Dave was able to orientate himself over the world he had never seen except with childish eyes of four. He picked out New York City and landed on its huge Long Island spacedrome. Attendants ran up to his ship when he had turned off the hot blasts, and began fastening hooks to drag it out of the way of other descending craft. It was a busy place. Dave was rather amazed.

He had hardly expected to see this much activity in a race faced with extinction. Dozens of ships were being loaded and unloaded. Figures scurried by ceaselessly.

As soon as Dave opened his hatch, he shouted aloud in pure exuberance at being back safe and sound, and with the means in his hands of saving mankind. Then he shouted above the noises to the attendants below, who didn't seem to notice his ship was any different from the hundreds of others that came and went in the interplanetary trade routes.

"I'm Dave Standish! Don't you know me? I'm the one who went to 61-Cygni with Dr. Roscoe. I'm back! And in my hold I have thousands of cans of red blood—life-giving blood from Rendora!

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The mission was completely successful! Humanity is saved! Bring me to the officials!"

He was baffled at their lack of enthusiasm. They looked at one another strangely. Then one of them shouted back: "Come down. We will take you before the Masters."

As Dave strode among them toward the drome's offices, he saw the men looking at him sorrowfully, as though they pitied him for something he did not know, rather than the frightful journey he had made. Dave was mystified even when he saw the queer, large-headed man into whose presence he was ushered.

"Dave Standish!" murmured the tall, thin official. His bulging cranium and lofty brow, fully twice that of an average man's, gave him a severely intellectual look. Dave began to feel a crushing inferiority.

"So you have returned!" went on the strange man. "Too bad!"

"What do you mean?" gasped Dave. "I have the hold of my ship filled with cans of blood from Rendora. From 61-Cygni. Surely you remember."

"That blood is being spilled already into the ground!" announced the official. "Dave Standish, your mission was a mistake, a worthless trip. The large-headed mutation, at first thought to be an insane type, was in reality a new species of man so infinitely superior that they *did* seem insane! Former man, like yourself, is a comparative atavist.

"I am of the new species. We run Earth now. We outnumber former man, your fellows, five to one. They are our servants, menials, subordinates. But we treat them kindly. However, we are letting them die out. They have all been sterilized. You are among the last of former mankind."

The large-headed man stopped suddenly. Startled, he peered closely at his listener, at his queerly distorted face—

"Rendora! Tara!"

The lips of Dave Standish moaned. Then they writhed open to issue a horrible laughter that made the large-headed man shudder and feel sick with pity.

The greatest fantastic story ever written—Coming next month

THE BLIND SPOT

By Austin Hall and Homer Eon Flint

MR. WRIGHT FOUND OUT HE WAS WRONG!
MR. WRIGHT: Gee, this stuff is awful! Why do all laxatives taste so bad?
MRS. WRIGHT: All of them don't. Ex-Lax tastes like delicious chocolate.
MR. W.: Ex-Lax? That's O.K. for you and Junior, but I need something stronger!
MRS. W.: No, you don't! Ex-Lax is just as effective as any bad-tasting cathartic.
LATER
MR. W.: I sure am glad I took your advice. It's Ex-Lax for me from now on.
MRS. W.: Yes, with Ex-Lax in the house we don't need any other laxative!
The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet *gentle!* No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax the next time you need a laxative. It's good for *every* member of the family.
10¢ and 25¢
Ex-Lax
THE CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE

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The Radio Man

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Parts III and IV

While experimenting with the wireless transmission of matter, Myles Cabot transmits himself to the planet Venus, where he falls in love with a beautiful native. To win her, he must free her country from its ant-men conquerors

CHAPTER X

BEFORE QUEEN FORMIS

AND so, while my princess was borne northward by her cousin and lover, Prince Yuri, I was led southward in chains, a prisoner charged with high treason against the Ant Empire. Yuri had tricked me, and had used me as a cat's-paw to rescue his sweetheart from her captors. But if I had not been so blindly in love, I should have seen through him, and could have married Lilla at peace under Formian auspices.

Yet, somehow, I did not feel sorry for what I had done. I had set Lilla free. I had won her love and trust for one night, and I was prepared to pay the penalty. In fact, I was *glad* to pay the penalty, for I realized that marriage between her, a princess, and me, a commoner, would of course never have been possible.

Back in my old room again in Wautoosa! It seemed like home, somehow; and yet how different from before, for now I was no longer a guest, but a prisoner.

Tabby, my pet buntlote, was glad to smell me again; and my conscience gave me a twinge for having so unceremoniously left her behind. Yet if I had taken her with me, what would have become of her in the wreck of the kerkool and the flight through the spider's tunnel?

Doggo was overwhelmed with grief at the jam I was in; and he was reproachful, too.

"Why did you do it?" he would ask again and again; and, in spite of my repeated and detailed explanations, would reiterate: "Why did you do it, when all was going so well here?"

Guards were placed over me again, as on my first arrival on the planet. But this time, instead of being high ranking officers such as Doggo, they were mere common soldier ants, who jested coarsely at me and without sympathy.

I complained to Doggo, and he promptly put a stop to their tormenting; and, when they found that I was still in the good graces of one of their eklats, they became on the surface quite deferential, although they continued to annoy me in many petty and underhanded ways.

Doggo spent a great deal of his time with me, and kept me posted on the latest news from Kuana, the capital of Cupia. In fact, he even dispatched one of his barpootahs to ascertain for me just how the princess fared.

Report had it that the princess was almost constantly in the company of Prince Yuri, and that he was hailed as a popular hero for having rescued her. That she seemed unaccountably sad—which item cheered me. That the king was momentarily expected to announce her betrothal to Prince Yuri—which item did not cheer me. That an influential faction, headed by Prince Toron, insisted upon an explanation being demanded from Queen Formis because of the detention of Princess Lilla by the ant-men. And that only the new popularity of Prince Yuri was able to control this movement of his younger brother.

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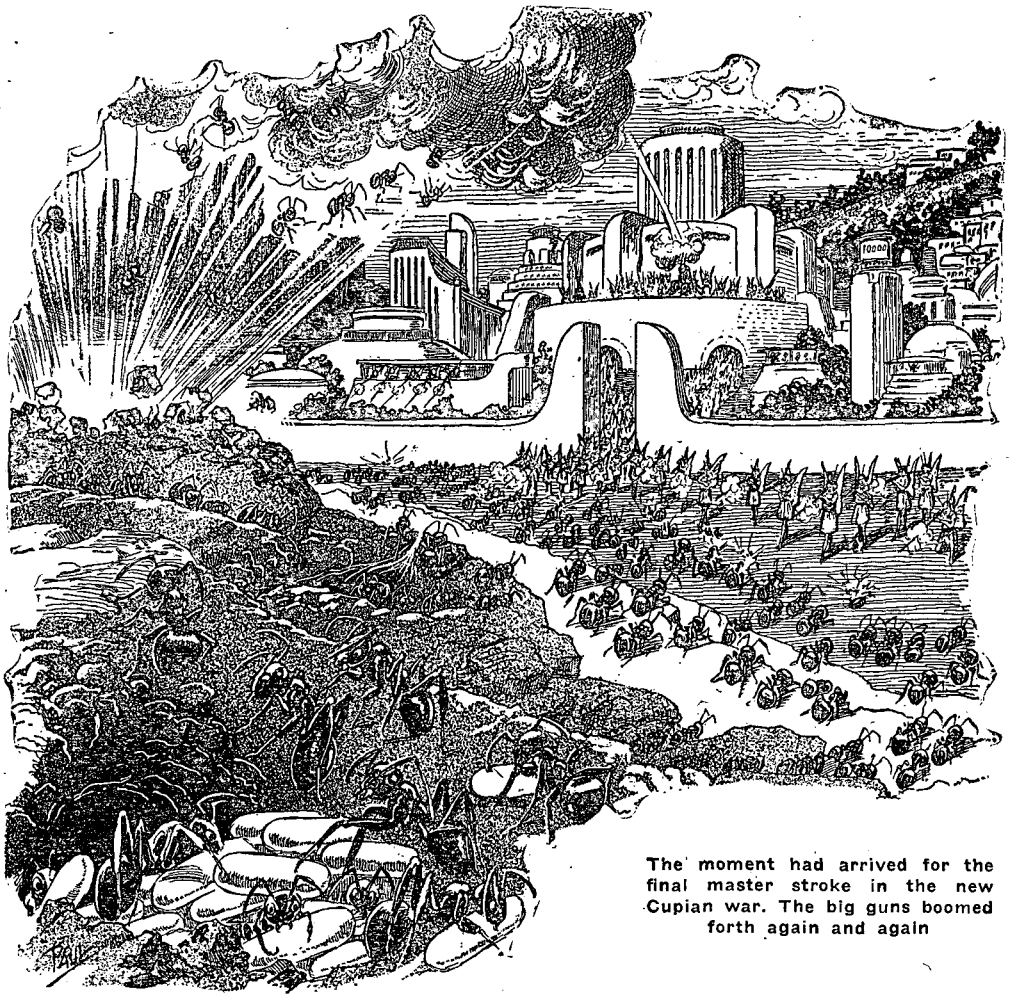

The moment had arrived for the final master stroke in the new Cupian war. The big guns boomed forth again and again

Oh, what a fool I had been not to have told Lilla that Yuri had been responsible for her imprisonment at Wautoosa! Now, of course, she believed him a hero, rather than the scoundrel he was. But how could he satisfactorily explain to her his repudiation of me?

No, if she retained the slightest friendly feeling for me, she could not regard him as anything other than a double-crossing crook. And did not the reports state that she seemed sad? Why else than either because of my fate or because she did not look forward with pleasure to a union with Yuri? But if the latter, then why did she associate with him? It must be that he was holding over her head a threat of some sort. My poor princess of the butterfly wings and graceful antennae!

I tried to get word to her, but Doggo informed me that criminals were not allowed the privilege of letter writing.

My interest was so centered in the beautiful Lilla that it never occurred to me to inquire as to my own fate, but Doggo insisted on bringing it to my attention. He had obtained his own assignment as my defense counsel, and so it was up to him to discuss with me the coming trial.

I was accused of high treason against the empire, in that I had assisted in the escape of a Cupian slave, had uttered a forged pass, had obstructed the highway, had nearly run down a pinqui, and had—

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presumably—slandered the Formians to a member of the royal house of Cupia.

Doggo said that I clearly had no defense, as all the items, except the slander, were easily provable; but that he should attempt to argue that the accusations were void for inconsistency, due to the fact that the same person was described in them as being both a slave and royalty. So far as I was concerned, this line of defense seemed absolute bunk, but no more so than many equally silly sounding legal rules on earth.

THE trial was to take place at the Imperial City before Queen Formis and the Council of Twelve, for apparently I had committed a most important and serious crime. In case of conviction, which seemed certain, Her Majesty would have the choice of two punishments. First, laying eggs in me. Or secondly, casting me into "The Valley of the Howling Rocks." Both sounded very interesting and were reserved for the worst criminals.

All of the ant-men of the entire nation of Formia are raised from eggs laid by the ruling monarch. The vocation of any given ant-man is determined long before he is hatched, or even before his egg is laid.

From an elaborate system of records, kept in the Imperial City, the Council of Twelve is able to determine, as to each batch of eggs, whether it should produce professors, farmers, laborers, officers, soldiers, servants, or what; and the eggs are accordingly laid in appropriate food. Sort of "tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are."

The young ants, when fully grown and in the cocoon stage, are transported by truckloads to the part of the empire where they are to be trained and where their life is to be spent. Thus the pupae for soldiers and officers are sent to Wautoosa, for instance.

Not only is occupation determined in advance, but so also, to a large extent, is sex. Thus only enough males are produced to supply the queen's harem, the rest of the royal offspring being sexless females. Whenever a queen dies, the council immediately chooses several likely larvae and changes their food so as to produce fully developed females; the first of these to reach maturity being made queens, and the rest being killed.

The food chosen for the production of the higher classes of ant-men consists of condemned criminals. This was where I came in.

At this point in the explanation an idea occurred to me.

"Do you really mean to say, Doggo," I gasped, "that you are a lady and not a man—that the whole nation of Formians are females?"

"Yes," he replied, "and furthermore the more highly developed of us occasionally lay eggs, though of course we never try to hatch them, for that would be even worse a treason than the one with which *you* are charged. I myself even have laid eggs, but it is generally supposed that such eggs would not hatch."

I could hardly believe it. A nation of Amazons! I could not help continuing to regard them as males.

But to go on with the alternative penalties. I have described the egg-laying. The other penalty, namely the Valley of the Howling Rocks, supplied a most diabolical form of punishment. This valley extends about a mile along the international boundary line, so that the pale stopped at one end and began again at the other. Its sides are steep and unscalable, and into it are cast the worst criminals of both countries. Some undetermined natural cause within the valley sets up such a terrific din that the victims are driven crazy and perish because of the sound.

I thought that I should prefer any noise, however awful, to the alternative of having eggs laid in me; but Doggo assured me that the valley was by far the worse of the two. However, my wishes finally prevailed, and Doggo promised to try and secure the valley punishment, in event of a conviction.

In due course the time arrived for the

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trial, and I was led in chains to the Imperial City. Doggo accompanied me, and brought along Tabby, too, to console me. For some reason I could not get at all excited over the performance, it seemed so absurdly like the trial of "Alice in Wonderland." As she is reported to have exclaimed, "Why, you're nothing but a pack of cards!" so I was often tempted to exclaim, "Why, you're nothing but a nest of ants!"

As a matter of fact, I was much more interested in how my princess was getting on than I was in my own impending fate.

On the day of the trial I was led into the awful presence of Queen Formis. She stood nearly twice the size of any other Formian, and her dignity was enhanced by a raised platform surmounted by a scarlet canopy, which well set off the perfect proportions of her jet-black body.

Grouped on each side of her stood six ant-men, whose refined and intelligent appearance made even my professorial friends of the University of Mooni look like common worker ants by comparison.

Ant messengers hurried to and fro, doing the bidding of the dread thirteen; while several large clumsy ants, of a type which I had never seen before, wandered aimlessly about the chamber.

"The Royal Husbands," Doggo informed me.

So these were the drones of Formia. They were very stupid looking fellows, who appeared to be accorded great privileges but no deference.

MY JAILERS led me to the foot of the throne, where, under instructions from Doggo, I made a low obeisance to the queen. Then I was locked into a wicker cage at one side, and the trial began.

First, one of the council read the accusation, and then the witnesses were called, each being permitted to tell his story in his own way, and not being subjected to cross-examination by Doggo; though any member of the court could ask him questions. On the whole, the procedure seemed much fairer than a trial on earth. For the evident object here was to ascertain the whole truth, unhampered by rules of evidence, rather than to afford a sparring match between rival attorneys.

The keeper of the kerkool-ool at Wautoosa testified in substance as follows: "The prisoner came at me unawares, overcame me, and trussed me up in a corner, where it took me a parth and a half to escape from my bonds. While I lay bound, Cabot stole Prince Yuri's car. I saw no one with Cabot, and in fact did not see Cabot take the car, but I judge that he took it, for I later found it gone."

"I object!" I cried.

"Keep quiet!" Doggo growled.

No one else paid any attention to my interruption.

The witness continued: "Immediately upon getting loose I notified the winko."

One of the winko's attendants then took the stand and corroborated him in this. It was a well-framed-up story, and I had no inclination to get the keeper of the kerkool-ool into trouble by disputing it.

The traffic sentinel ant gave an exact and straightforward account of how he had stopped us and had trapped me into many damaging statements. Also how I had tried to run him down with the kerkool, which was not exactly the truth; but doubtless it had seemed that way to him. Then he produced the forged pass, which was handed around and carefully inspected by the council.

Several ant-men then testified as to their pursuit of us, including the wrecking of their own car by means of ours. They had tried to dig into the tunnel and had failed, so they had killed the spider with a long pole. They had confidently expected to find us behind the umbrella. Never before having seen a double-ended spider cave, they had not scattered through the woods to cut off our retreat.

Even so, they could not account for our escape, especially as they had kept the road from there to the border constantly patrolled by kerkools from that time on until my arrest at the Third Gate. You see, they had slipped up by not realizing

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that I possessed the sense of hearing, which had enabled me to avoid the patrols.

The *Cupian* sentinel at the Third Gate had claimed his official privilege of refusing to testify, but the *ant* sentinel quoted his Cupian colleague as saying that he had let the Princess Lilla pass through because he had no authority over members of the royal family, but had duly arrested me as required by law. No mention was made of Prince Yuri's presence at the gate to "rescue" her from me.

I tried to get Doggo to object on the ground of hearsay, for this was the first and only attempt by the prosecution at identifying my companion in flight, and hence was most damaging; but Doggo replied that hearsay testimony was perfectly allowable on Poros, unless one could impeach either the absent or the present witness. How much more sensible than the rule in America!

Then I was called upon.

"Do I have to take the stand?" I asked.

"No," answered Doggo, "but if you don't your silence will be used against you."

Again a more sensible rule than that which prevails in America; only all these Formian improvements over American criminal practice were decidedly to my own disadvantage.

I was just about to tell how Yuri had planned Lilla's rescue with me when something stayed me. I wish now that it had not, for to have told the truth at this time would have prevented a tragedy which later occurred! But my New England spirit of fair play deterred me, and I decided to settle with Yuri myself and personally; though how I ever hoped to escape from the ants, in order to do so, I did not stop to consider.

So I spoke as follows: "Everything testified so far is the truth. But I wish to ask Your Majesty, in all respect, just what justification had Formia to detain the Princess of Cupia as a slave? You should have treated her as visiting royalty; and in that capacity she had a perfect right to command my assistance, and I had a perfect right to obey. Let me tell the rulers of Formia that—"

But I got no further, for the queen thundered: "Stop! I find the prisoner guilty by his own admission. Further evidence is superfluous, and I shall proceed to sentence. Has any one any suggestions to make on *this* subject?"

Whereupon my old friend the Professor of Anatomy stepped forward. Doggo had evidently primed him to do me a good turn, for he said:

"The prisoner is neither a Cupian nor a Formian, nor is it apparent just what sort of animal he is. He seems to be a reasoning species, and so can be tried for a crime and accorded the same privileges of trial as in the case of a member of either of the two recognized reasoning species of this planet. But, as he is an unknown type of creature, it is extremely likely that his flesh would prove harmful to the royal babies. Accordingly, for the good of the Empire, I advise that Your Majesty impose the more severe of the alternative sentences, namely, the Valley of the Howling Rocks."

AS NO one else present had any suggestion to make, Queen Formis and the council conferred together for a few moments, and then the sentence was announced. As I hoped, it was the Valley. The professor had done well!

Convicted criminals on Poros are not kept in suspense day after day, as on earth. We started for the Valley the very next morning. Apparently an execution is an important state occasion on this planet, for a long line of kerkools trailed out of the Imperial City, carrying the queen, several of the council, and some lesser dignitaries, as well as Doggo, Tabby, myself, and my guards.

Doggo was deeply touched by grief. But, for myself, I was still unable to get up any very great excitement over the affair. Perhaps I am a fatalist, but I could not believe that I was really going to die. It all seemed like a dream from which I was soon about to awake. And even if I should

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appear to die on this planet, was it not likely that I would awake on the earth again in my Boston laboratory, and thus put an end to a very interesting set of imaginary adventures?

But at this thought a pang stabbed my heart, and I resolved that I had rather actually die than have it turn out that my meeting with the Princess Lilla had not been a fact.

The authorities permitted me to write her a note of farewell, and Doggo guaranteed to deliver it personally, thus assuring that it would get past Yuri. Into this letter I crowded all my pent-up love, and urged her to feel no regrets at my having been sacrificed in her behalf, as that sacrifice was gladly and happily given.

Then I patted my little pet Tabby farewell, turned her over to Doggo's care, and was led by my executioners to the edge of the abyss. It was a harmless enough looking gulch, but the scores of human skeletons and ant shells, scattered about the bottom, bore mute witness to its dread possibilities.

And witness, not mute, was borne by the volume of noise which rolled up over the edge of the valley. I had thought that I had heard the limit of stupendous sound when years ago I stood at the brink of Niagara, but the roar which arose from the Valley of the Howling Rocks dwarfed even Niagara by comparison.

And into this chaos infernal I was about to be lowered. It was of course impossible to hear spoken farewells, so I patted the side of Doggo's head good-by, at which last demonstration he turned away broken-hearted. But the others seemed to be thoroughly enjoying the spectacle. Then my shackles were removed, so as to give free play to my amusing antics during the torture, a strong rope was placed under my arms, and I was lowered into the pit.

Even as I passed over the edge, my thoughts consisted chiefly in wondering, not what fate was in store for me, but rather what it was that made the noise. Always I shall remain an inquisitive scientist, I suppose.

The noise became unbearable. Looking upward as the ropes spun me around, I saw the horrid face of the ant queen, leering over the edge. She lifted up a paw. To my surprise, the Formians who held the ropes began to raise me again. A reprieve? Life again on the planet Poros, with a possible chance of seeing my princess once more?

No—merely a respite! Or, rather, a cat-and-mouse game which they were playing with me.

Several times more I was lowered into the pit, was held there until I could scarcely bear the noise, and then was hauled up again for a brief breathing space. But finally my feet were permitted to touch the bottom, and the rope was pulled from beneath my arms.

That awful noise—I cannot describe the agony of it! Madly I dashed back and forth, trying to avoid it; but there was no escape.

"Lilla! Lilla!" I shrieked in agony, but the terrific din kept even me from hearing my own words.

I stumbled on a boulder, fell—and, falling, struck my head against a sharp rock.

Then blessed oblivion!

CHAPTER XI

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

DRIVEN crazy by the awful noise, I had finally fallen, as many a victim of the Valley of the Howling Rocks had done before. In falling I had knocked my head against a stone and had become unconscious.

At last I gradually came to; and the first thing that I noticed, and that brought me out of my stupor with a jerk, was the fact that absolute silence reigned.

I sat up and looked around. Yes, I was still in the same valley, surrounded by whitened bones and rusted carapaces. But the oppressive din had ceased. Had the death-dealing howls been purely an artificial creation, and had they been turned off at my supposed decease?

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My late executioners had gone, so I was free to escape, if escape were possible. But first I wished to find out why the noise had stopped. Ever the incorrigible scientist! So I arose to my feet, and instantly noticed that my headset was off, and was trailing on the ground. It must have been knocked off when my head struck the rock.

I was just about to replace the phones over my ears, when I heard a roar proceeding from them. And then I realized that the awful sound for which the valley was famous was not sound at all, but consisted merely in radiations of some sort, which had been caught and translated into sound by my radio apparatus. There were some advantages, after all, in my possessing a different kind of sense of hearing from that prevalent on Poros.

So I switched off my current, and then replaced my headset. The next problem was to get out of the valley. Not being confused by the howling roar, I had an advantage over the many victims who had preceded me. Undoubtedly it was this quite natural confusion which had rendered it impossible for victims in the past to climb the walls, and so had given these walls their undeserved reputation for unscalability. Even as it was, quite a while elapsed before I found sufficient crevices conveniently placed, so that I could make my way to the top.

Finally I stood at the rim, a free man!

And then I voluntarily went back down again into that valley of death. Why? Because, being primarily an inquisitive scientist, I wanted to procure samples of the howling rocks, for purposes of analysis if ever I should be in a laboratory again. So I collected several different kinds of fragments and did them up in a knotted corner of my toga.

Once more I scaled the steep walls, and stood again at the rim. I was free! No one would ever look for me, as I was officially dead. I could pass as a Cupian, for my disguise was still intact, and I had freshly shaved that morning so as to make a presentable corpse.

Life on Poros was ahead of me, and Poros held the Princess Lilla!

The only fly in the ointment was that I had lost my sense of direction, and so did not know whether I now stood on the Formian or on the Cupian side of the pale. Accordingly, I proceeded with caution. After skirting the Valley of the Howling Rocks, I followed the pale, hoping to come at last to some gate which would furnish a clue as to which side I was on.

A strong wind was blowing, as is usual on Poros, and I knew that of course it blew toward the sea. But, as I did *not* know whether the sea lay east or west from here, the wind was of no assistance in enabling me to orient myself.

The pale was a thirty-foot sheer wall of glazed concrete, running in practically a geodesic line across the country, sometimes through woods and sometimes through green fields.

Where it ran through the woods, the trees and bushes along it—at least on the side which I was on—had been cut away for quite a wide swath, evidently for the purpose of preventing any one from using them to surmount the walls.

As I could see no one on top of the wall in either direction, I followed this cleared space, which made traveling considerably more easy. There was no fear of detection except when I passed through open fields, but I had to do this quite frequently.

One field contained a herd of the milk-giving aphids, which I had nicknamed "green cows." Their presence convinced me that I must still be in Formia, until I reflected that I did not know but that the Cupians also raised them.

At last I came to a road which ran along by the pale for a way and then curved off again. Down this road I walked until I saw ahead of me, where the road topped a slight rise, two ant-men coming toward me. Instantly I concealed myself in a tartan bush at one side.

SOON I heard their approach; and, suddenly noticing that I could not hear their voices, I switched on my apparatus,

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which had been disconnected ever since I had replaced my headset in the Valley of the Howling Rocks. Thanks to my Indestructo tube, the apparatus was still intact.

And now a strange low growl almost drowned out what they were saying, so that with difficulty I distinguished the following words: "I could swear that I saw a Cupian approaching on the road ahead of us; but now he is nowhere to be seen."

Then the other said: "Never mind what you *saw*. Do you *hear* what I hear? We had better be on our guard, for it sounds like the roar of some absolutely new and strange animal."

"It sounds to me," replied the other, "more like the awful Valley, only much softer. It seems to come from this tartan bush. Shall we investigate?"

As he mentioned the valley, I instantly realized what was the cause of the trouble. The radioactive fragments tied up in the corner of my toga had revealed my presence. If I wanted to escape, I would have to leave my precious samples behind. With a sigh I undid the knot, dropped the pieces on the ground, and dashed out through the back of the bush, just as the ant-men broke in through the front of it. It was lucky for me that my pursuers had no ordinary sense of hearing, or they would have heard my departure.

Safe in another bush, I listened to their amazed remarks at finding the stones. But, after puzzling and debating for some time, they finally resumed their journey.

I was about to return for my specimens, when I reflected that they might attract other attention, and might even serve as a clue to suggest that I was a convict, escaped from the awful valley, so I reluctantly left them lying where they were.

Instead of continuing along the road, however, I now retraced my steps to the wall, for the presence of the ant-men had made me certain that I was still in Formia, and hence it became necessary for me to find some place where I could get through to the other side. Accordingly, I proceeded along beside the wall.

The day was warm and moist, as are all days on Poros, but as I went on the weather got hotter, damper and more oppressive. Finally the sky began to turn dark.

"Aha!" said I. "Now it is evening, and I shall be able to get my bearings by the pink light in the west."

But no pink light appeared on any hand. Never before had I seen a night descend like this upon this planet. Then with a crash the sky was split in two by a living flame, and the storm broke in all its fury.

The roar of the thunder was like a continuous artillery barrage. Spiral vorticles of wind hurled the rain in my face and nearly twisted me off my feet, as I anchored myself to a tree trunk to withstand its fury.

But fortunately the storm was as brief as it was severe, and soon I was again pressing on beneath silver skies.

In spite of the storm, the weather kept on getting more and more oppressive, until, on cresting a hill, I saw before me the cause of all the trouble. About two stads ahead there rose a solid wall of vapor, stretching away to the horizon on each side and to the silver clouds above, and giving forth such an intense heat in my direction that I could scarcely bear it. Every now and then a few drops of scalding water would fall on me from above.

This must be the Boiling Sea, of which I had heard so much and which surrounds all continental Poros. It was an impressive sight.

The pale ended only about a stad ahead, and yet for the life of me I could not summon up courage enough to try and pass around its end. In fact, I could not conceive how the wall ever could have been built even that far, in the face of that terrific heat.

Later I learned that it had been built little by little behind a huge screen of woven fire-worm fur, and only during offshore breezes at that.

Well, there was nothing for me to do but turn around and retrace my steps, back to the Valley of the Howling Rocks and

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beyond, in search for an opening through the wall.

My earthly ears caught the sound of an approaching kerkool, and as the road was fortunately passing through the woods at the time, I hid myself in a convenient tartan bush.

But this time I displaced one of the huge leaves sufficiently so that, with one eye, I could cover the road. What was my joy to note, as the car passed, that it was of Cupian make and held Cupians!

WHEN the kerkool was safely out of sight and hearing, I resumed my march, and soon came in view of a city of a type so different from any which I had previously seen on Poros that it might well have belonged to another world.

I sat down in a hillside pasture beside the road, amidst gently grazing aphids, and gazed upon the beautiful sight. The city was set upon a rounded hill. On the very summit stood a group of monumental white buildings, ornamented with domes, minarets and stately columns. From this group down to the foot of the hill and across the plain toward where I sat there stretched a plaza of well kept silver sward, flanked by walks and ornamental trees.

The road ran square to the nearer edge of this park, where it forked abruptly and skirted both sides of the lawn. Flanking this divided road, and extending around the base of the hill, stood a multitude of houses; gray concrete or stucco, with high pitched red tile roofs. Nothing more different from the ant cities to which I was accustomed could be imagined.

That I was at last in Cupia, the country of my princess, there could now be no question. And, as if to resolve my last possible doubt, night now fell, and the pink sky on my left assured me that I was, in truth, north of the pale and that the hated country of my captivity lay far behind me.

As the silver gray faded overhead, I realized that I had had nothing to eat since a condemned man's conventional hearty meal early that morning. So, utilizing the few remaining minutes of daylight, I fashioned a tartan leaf into a rude cup and filled it with green milk from the contented cows.

Then, laying my weary body upon the ground and covering myself with tartan leaves, I turned in for the night and slept the healthy sleep of utter exhaustion.

THE next morning I awakened greatly refreshed, and after breakfasting from the friendly aphids, set off to enter the beautiful city.

I was badly in need of a shave and my toga was mussed and soiled. But my disguise was still intact, and without too much scrutiny I might still pass as a Cupian. Yet I did not dare ask where I was, not knowing what the Cupian customs might be with regard to strangers.

My first desire was to procure a shaving knife and a clean toga, but I had no idea how to go about it. In Formia there had been no shops; everything necessary had simply been "issued," as in the army, but without even the need of signing a receipt. But quite likely the Cupian custom was different.

Then, too, I wanted lodgings and a job, but did not know how to go about this either.

Fortunately, however, I overheard a conversation between two Cupians which gave me a clue as to how to proceed.

"Yahoo, Jodek," one of them hailed the other. "How is it that you are in Kuana today?"

My heart gave a bound. Kuana, the capital city of Cupia, and home of my princess! Fate was indeed repaying me well for all the hard knocks it had given me.

The one addressed as Jodek answered: "I have walked in from Ktuth to register for a job here in Kuana. Can you direct me to the Ministry of Work?"

And the two friends walked away, chatting together, while the germ of an idea sprouted in my mind. I too would be from Ktuth, looking for a job.

Occasionally I passed some very offici-

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ous looking person armed with a short broadsword.

I assumed these were pinquis, or Porovian policemen.

Finally, when I felt sure that Jodek had had plenty of time in which to report, I approached one of these policemen, told him that I was from Ktuth, and asked him the way to the Ministry of Work.

"Too bad about all the trouble at Ktuth, isn't it?" said he.

I assented vaguely.

"Do you think that it was the fault of Count Kamel?" he continued.

He was getting entirely too garrulous and was likely at any moment to trap me into some damaging slip. I was just about to reply irrelevantly that Duke Lucky Strike was entirely to blame, when whom should I see walking down the street but my enemy and betrayer, Yuri! And at that instant he too saw me.

Let me digress for a moment. I find that in writing down this account of my adventures I frequently use earth words instead of the more exact Porovian synonym. Thus I have just said "count" and "duke," although these words are not strictly accurate. I might have said "barsarkar" and "sarkar" instead; but I believe that a clearer impression will be created on my readers—if this manuscript ever reaches the Earth—by occasionally using Earth words where this does not involve too great a stretch in their meaning.

Well, as I was saying: Here, to my surprise and horror, came the last person on Poros whom I desired to see, namely Prince Yuri. Each of us was equally astonished to see the other, but Yuri was the first to recover his presence of mind.

"Pinqui," he shouted peremptorily to the Cupian policeman, "arrest that man and take him to the mang-ool. I myself will answer to the mango. And tell the mango that I forbid conversation with the prisoner."

Then, turning to me with a smile, Yuri remarked:

"Welcome to Kuana, my friend. You are as welcome here as a spot of sunlight, and have just as bad a habit of turning up. The last I heard of you, you were condemned to death. How you escaped from the ant-men I know not, but perhaps you will find that Cupian justice is surer than Formian."

Then to the officer, as I started to reply: "Pinqui, if he says a word to me, to you, or to any one, strike him on the antennae! I have spoken."

And he strode majestically away, as the pinqui seized me roughly by the arm and led me to the mang-ool, or jail, of the city of Kuana.

At the mang-ool the pinqui turned me over to the mango, to whom he repeated Yuri's message, whereupon I noticed a peculiar vindictive expression creep across the jailer's face.

Then I was led to a cell and locked in. Once more I was out of luck. A few minutes ago I had been free, and full of joy at finding myself in the city of my princess; now I was in the toils again, and—what was worse—in the power of the man who was my deadly rival for Lilla's hand, and who, for aught that I knew, was already betrothed to her.

At all events, he was the most powerful single individual in all Cupia, next to his uncle the king.

I was certainly in a jam! And, to make matters worse, my jailer evidently a thoroughly vicious personality.

CHAPTER XII

A VICTIM OF YURI

BUT the malevolence of the jailer was not directed against me, for as he turned away, after locking me in my cell, he softly radiated the joyous information: "Any one who is an enemy of Prince Yuri has nothing to fear from Poblath."

Then he was gone. Evidently, in spite of Yuri's popularity, there were some Cupians who saw through him. And Poblath, the mango, must be one of these. Shortly afterwards he returned with food, and spoke softly as he placed it before me.

"'Walls have antennae,'" he said; "so

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I will not radiate loudly to you. Be discreet. Do nothing to anger Yuri. Bide your time. And if I can be of any particular service, let me know. 'Common enmity maketh close friends.'"

Evidently Poblath was greatly given to Porovian proverbs.

About one parth (or Porovian hour) later the mango brought Prince Yuri to my cell. Yuri had come to gloat over me and to give in my presence his directions for my discomfiture.

"Poblath," he declared, "this man Cabot is a dangerous criminal. The charges against him are so serious that I must lay them in person before King Kew. Cabot is a deaf-mute, born without antennae; but he has concocted, with diabolical cleverness, some artificial electrical antennae. No one is to be permitted to talk with him; and, to make sure of this, I now command you to take from him his apparatus."

My jaw dropped with horror at the thought; but the jailer quickly came to my rescue.

"Oh, sire," he said, "the ancient law! I will see that no communication is had with him, but the ancient law prohibits depriving any person of his antennae."

Yuri replied: "This is not a person; it is an animal. And furthermore, his apparatus is not antennae, strictly speaking."

Poblath was equal to the occasion. "The ancient law applies equally to animals, as you well know, my prince. And, as for his antennae, they are antennae to me, unless King Kew rules otherwise."

"Leave his antennae,' then," snapped Yuri, "and remove his belt."

But Poblath was obdurate, and stood upon his rights. "If his belt serves his antennae, I demand a kingly ruling. I have spoken."

Yuri scowled.

"A ruling you shall have," he gritted, as he turned away. "Meanwhile, keep the prisoner by himself."

"Your will is law," Poblath answered, with mock meekness.

So at last I had a friend in Cupia. When the mango returned to bring me my supper I determined to take him into my confidence.

"Poblath," I said, as a feeler, "who rescued the Princess Lilla from the Formians?"

"It was Prince Yuri," he replied. "It is the one decent act of his life, though his beautiful cousin does not seem to be particularly grateful to him for it."

"Then she is not yet betrothed to him?" I asked.

"Not yet, nor ever!" was the emphatic answer.

"Poblath," I declared, "Yuri did *not* rescue the princess. *I* did it. Can you get word to her that I am here?"

"By the blue-horned woofus!" he ejaculated. "Can I? Just watch me!"

"If you straighten this out," I said, "I shall be most eternally grateful."

At which the mango quoted sententiously, "He who expects gratitude hath not conferred a favor.'" Then he hurried away.

Late that evening he returned to my cell with a most exquisite specimen of Cupian femininity, whom he introduced as Bthuh, maid in waiting to Princess Lilla.

If Lilla was all that was desirable in a blonde, Bthuh was all that was desirable in a brunette; full lips, clear olive skin, dark languorous eyes, a seductive form. A chestnut baby-doll, with smoldering southern passion underneath. She was a red rose, overripe. Although my allegiance never wavered for an instant from the lovely Lilla, yet I must confess that the presence of this exotic beauty strangely stirred me. And she smiled at me, as though she thought me not half bad, either.

Then she spoke: "I am betrothed to Poblath, although secretly because my rank of sarkari [duchess] should prevent an alliance with a commoner. That brink [this was a particularly choice epithet to apply to Yuri, for "brink" is the name of the little hopping lizard that infests the concrete roads]—that brink has been trying to make love to me, though in a most unflattering way, in spite of my rank. His standing is such that I dare not oppose

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him openly; but Poblath and I are friends of yours, since you are an enemy of our enemy. You may tell us your story without fear."

SO I told them in detail my entire adventures on this planet, from my finding myself beside the silver lake on the day of the explosion in my Boston laboratory, down to date, omitting of course the more intimate passages between myself and the Princess Lilla. When I finished, I could see that I was assured of their cooperation; not only because of our common hatred of Prince Yuri, but also because of the merits of my own case.

"The next step," Poblath announced, "is for Bthuh to tell her mistress that you are here. Once the princess knows this, we can be sure that she will confide in Bthuh, and thus we can learn definitely where matters stand."

Then the two lovers withdrew, leaving me to spend a far happier night than I had had any reason to expect.

The next day passed uneventfully. Evidently Yuri was having some difficulty in getting his desired ruling from the king relative to my antennae.

Nightfall again brought with it the dark and beautiful Bthuh, to her tryst with the mango, Poblath. And Bthuh brought news of the princess, who sent word to me to be of good cheer, for her father, the king, was to inspect the Kuana jail on the morrow.

Just what good this would do me I could not see; but I took Lilla's word for it that this was good tidings.

Preparatory to the visit, I obtained materials from Poblath and shaved.

On the next day, the third day of my imprisonment, Kew XII, King of Cupia, attended by his suite, inspected the Kuana jail, and in due course was conducted to my cell. The king was a broad shouldered, narrow hipped, athletic figure, looking like a well preserved earth-man of about fifty years of age. His complexion was bronzed, his nose slightly aquiline, and his hair iron gray, short and furry. His eyes were black and piercing, and his mouth and jaw firm. Justice, but not mercy, sat upon his kingly brow.

He and I studied each other calmly for a few moments. And then I lost my calm, for in the royal suite stood my princess! I was about to cry out to her when her expression stayed me; so instead I merely acknowledged her presence with a bow, and said: "My life is, as ever, at the service of the Princess Lilla."

Whereat the king turned to his daughter and asked: "Who is this man who seems to know you, and who claims the honor of being a servitor of the royal house?"

But before she could answer, one of the suite stepped forward and declared: "I know the prisoner, sire, and he is none other than Myles Cabot, a great scientist from the planet Minos, recently feasted and honored at the University of Formia. Surely his imprisonment must be a mistake."

My new defender was the Cupian professor who had stood at the head table at the banquet in my honor my first night in Mooni.

"Then," declared the king, "this must be the Cabot of whom Prince Yuri spoke, urging us to consent that he be deprived of his artificial antennae. A great scientist he must be to have designed such an apparatus; but Yuri assures us that he is likewise a great criminal and a dangerous enemy of the Kew dynasty, of which facts Yuri has promised us full particulars shortly. Speak, man, and tell us your version of your crimes."

I hesitated, but the princess answered my unspoken thought: "My good fellow, you need not fear to tell everything to my father, the king."

So I told. I told the whole story of my life on Poros, omitting nothing except my love for the Princess Lilla. It was nearly a whole parth in the telling, and all those present hung on every word.

When I was done, the king, amazed, turned to his daughter and inquired: "Can this be true? Is the crown prince such a

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scoundrel that he would abduct the princess royal, and then falsely claim the credit for her rescue?"

To which Lilla replied: "I know nothing of Prince Yuri's complicity in my abduction, though it seems to fit in with his other acts. But I do know that he has claimed undeserved credit, which is an unforgivable breach of the Cupian ethics of fair play."

The king called to one of his courtiers: "Go, forthwith, and order the prince to repair immediately to our quarters. We shall sift this matter to the bottom. And" —turning on me—"if your story proves false, it will go hard with you; but if your story proves to be true, it will go hard with Prince Yuri."

And he swept from my presence, followed by his suite. And last of all by the Princess Lilla, who turned and smiled sweetly on me, just as she was leaving.

NO FURTHER word came from the palace all that day, but late that afternoon Prince Yuri visited the jail with a number of his courtiers. He was furiously angry. Poblath was with him, endeavoring to calm him down and to divert him from seeing me, but Yuri was insistent.

As the door of my cell was flung open, the prince started to abuse me.

"How dare you malign a member of the ruling house?" he thundered. "How dare you lie, and involve the Princess Lilla in your lies? I have a mind to kill you on the spot, and thus rid the planet of your foul presence."

And he would have gone on if I had not had a sudden inspiration.

"Yuri," said I, "you woofus, brink, mathlab! I'll—get—your—number!"

The effect was electrical. The prince's face went white with rage. Then he calmed, and a smile overspread his face.

"Pardon me, sir, but I'll get yours," he replied with a low bow.

Poblath interjected: "You poor fool, Cabot! Prince Yuri is the best duelist in all Cupia."

"'A brink may hop once too often beneath the kerkool,'" I quoted. "But come, I see that we do not rush at each other as they do in Formia. What are supposed to be the formalities here?"

"You will learn soon enough," Yuri growled, scowling ominously.

But Poblath more kindly explained: "Each of you chooses an attendant, and then the attendants tie you together, and you kill with knives."

This reminded me of Mark Twain's "Gattling guns at fifteen paces." I chose Poblath, and Yuri chose one of his own suite. A peculiar harness was then produced, consisting of a double belt. One half of this was buckled around Yuri's waist; but when they came to buckle me into the other half, my radio apparatus, which was concealed beneath my toga, furnished an obstacle, and so there was nothing for me to do but take it off. This, of course, would render me entirely deaf during the fight, which fact might prove somewhat disadvantageous.

But before they took away my hearing they explained fully to me just how the duel would be conducted. And I cautioned Poblath to keep a firm hold of my apparatus and not to let it get into the hands of any of Yuri's henchmen even for an instant.

"Otherwise," I said, "the ancient law might easily become violated."

Then I shed my antennae, and stood once more, an earth-man, ready to battle for my existence against the inhabitants of Poros.

We were belted together, face to face, waist touching waist. Each of us held a short sharp dagger in his left hand—Cupians being a left-handed race—while the right hand of each of us seized the left wrist of his opponent. The idea was for me to try and stab Yuri to death before he could stab me, and *vice versa*.

Yuri had the advantage on the offensive, for he held his dagger in his strong hand, whereas I held mine in my weak. But conversely, I had the advantage on the defensive, for it was my strongest hand which warded him off.

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No spoken signal could be given, because of my receiving set being off. So Poblath held up his hand and both of us watched it. Then when he let it fall we started to wrestle.

Yuri might be the most perfect physical specimen in all Cupia, but I was from a planet where the greater attraction of gravity necessitated a greater strength on the average. However, I soon perceived that these Porovian duels are not to be won by strength alone. There were tricks and feints by which one's opponent could be tired out. And I was a mere novice, while Yuri was regarded as the most expert duelist on all Poros.

We tumbled and rolled about the floor, with first his knife and then mine near its mark. At last we both struggled to our feet again and swayed back and forth for a moment.

And then, gradually, Yuri's dagger began to descend. Strain as I would, I could not stay its slow and steady progress toward my heart. A gleam of exultation filled the eye of my opponent. The point of his knife pricked my breast, and began to enter. In a few seconds it would be over and I should fall a victim of an alien race.

A strange train of ideas ran through my affrighted mind: "Alien race. Japanese. Jujitsu. The very thing! The ulnar nerve!"

Suddenly shifting my grip on his wrist, I forced my thumb into the sensitive spot; and instantly his knife, about to pierce my heart, dropped instead from his nerveless fingers and clattered harmlessly to the floor.

And now what was the etiquette of the situation?

I turned my glance from Yuri's eyes to those of Poblath and saw the latter frantically motioning me to kill. To kill! Nothing would give me greater pleasure.

But as I returned to the task, I noted the Princess Lilla standing in the crowd, with a look of terror on her face. Her appealing eyes showed that she was speaking to me, probably urging me to spare the prince.

So she cared for the scoundrel after all!

In disgust, I threw my own knife into a corner, and signaled to Poblath to remove the belts. He did so, reproachfully, and then handed me my receiving set.

Something prompted me to put it on in haste, and it is well that I did so, for as I snapped the ear phones in place, I heard Yuri shout: "Quick, two of you cover Cabot and the mango."

Instantly each of us was forced to the wall with a sharp broadsword at our breast; while Yuri seized the princess, and surrounded by the rest of his suite, made a hasty exit from the cell room.

CHAPTER XIII

KIDNAPED

AS YURI, surrounded by his bodyguard, dragged Princess Lilla from the room, I had an inspiration; I remembered the superstitious legend about me, which prevailed among the farmer ants of Formia.

"Halt!" I shouted. "My electrical antennae can kill as well as radiate speech. Let no man move a foot, if he would escape the lightnings of heaven, which I have power to loose upon you."

The whole party stopped dead in their tracks and watched me, fascinated.

"Drop your points!" I ordered the two who guarded Poblath and me. "Quick, before I blast you!"

They obeyed, and I walked fearlessly across the room.

"Let one man stir, and you all die," I continued as I pushed between the guards and wrenched the princess from her cousin's nerveless arms. "Now, out of here, all of you!"

In sheer relief, like men awakened from a trance, they bolted through the door.

"Fine work," Poblath remarked, himself greatly relieved, "but you should have detained them all as prisoners."

"Good riddance of bad rubbish," I replied, "and besides, who knows how soon one of them might have moved, and *not* have been blasted, and thus have spoiled my entire bluff?"

The princess clung to my arms. Then, raising her eyes to mine with a smile, she

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said: "Again, you have saved me, Myles Cabot, and again I am yours."

"And I am always yours, my princess," I replied.

She stamped her foot. Then said sadly: "Ever you remind me that I am a princess. And as a princess I must demand more respect from you, Myles Cabot."

Gently I released her, and she lingeringly departed, leaving me alone with Poblath. I felt let down and futile, the victim of an anticlimax. What next?"

And then ensued a period of waiting. Days passed, and I still remained an inmate of the Kuana jail. No word from Princess Lilla. No word from King Kew. No word of Prince Yuri, although rumor had it that he had fled into Formia, fearing the wrath of the king.

I heard that a group of the younger politicians in the popular assembly, headed by Prince Toron, had suggested to the king that he demand an apology from Queen Formis for the first abduction of the princess, and that he demand extradition of Yuri on the charge of attempting the second.

But King Kew was in a ticklish position, being the ruler of a subject race, and holding his position merely by grace of Formis, whom he hated, as she well knew. If he were to present any such demand as this, the least which he could expect would be an immediate counterdemand for my surrender. Formis might demand his abdication in favor of Yuri. Even war might result, which the Cupians were unarmed to resist. This would mean tons of explosives dropped upon Kuana from Formian airplanes, thousands of Cupians ground between fierce mandibles, and then another treaty more degrading even than that of Mooni.

So King Kew resorted to diplomacy, rather than to ultimatums; and finally reached a tacit understanding, whereby Queen Formis disclaimed responsibility for the kidnaping and made a gift to the Princess Lilla, and whereby Prince Yuri was permitted to remain undisturbed in Formia, and I in Cupia.

Now, upon the consummation of the agreement between the two countries, I was let out of prison and conducted to the royal palace, where I was received in honor by the king and princess. The palace was one of the monumental white buildings on the brow of the hill around which the city of Kuana is built, the rest of the group being the university.

Lilla greeted me cordially as an old friend; but of course in the presence of the king neither of us dared show any stronger sentiments.

King Kew patted me warmly on the cheek.

"Well done, Myles Cabot!" he declared. "We welcome to Kuana the scientist of Minos. Formis, by her treachery, has lost your great abilities, and Cupia is the gainer thereby. The old hag may gnash her mandibles in vain, but—"

"Father, father," interjected the princess remonstratingly, "do be careful! Remember that you occupy your throne merely by the grace of the conquerors."

"And by the disgrace of my ancestors," he added, grimacing.

"But, father," she continued, "'walls have antennae.' Even now, word of your utterances may be on the way to the Imperial City." And she laid her golden curly head beguilingly on his broad shoulder.

Somewhat mollified, the king murmured, "I know. I know. And I must be careful. But the enslavement of my people irks me, even though I spring from a line of eleven servile kings. Would that there were some way of striking off the yoke and ridding the face of Poros of these beasts with human minds and woofus hearts!"

"Spoken like a king!" I cried. "Know then, King Kew and Princess Lilla, that if ever such a day comes, Myles Cabot can be counted on to fight in the vanguard of the army of liberation."

"Brave words," Lilla replied in a subdued tone, "but foolish as well. We are only brinks; Formis is a woofus, and it is futile to struggle against fate."

She sighed.

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Kew sat down heavily on his throne and put his head in his hands. I considered it tactful to withdraw.

QUARTERS were found for me near by the palace, and the Ministry of Work assigned me, for my two parths a day, to the machine shop of the Department of Mechanics at the University. Tickets were issued to me as an advance on my pay, and this enabled me to make many necessary purchases from the government shops, to replace the articles borrowed during my incarceration in the mangool, and to buy presents for Poblath and his fiancée. Among my purchases was the most elaborate and expensive silk toga which I could obtain in the city, so as to enhance my standing and dignity at court functions.

A few days after my release the king honored me with an invitation to dinner with him and the princess alone; and this was followed, within a few days, by a banquet to some of the leading nobles—sarkars and barsarkars—and professors of the University—babbuhs.

On this latter occasion I met the Cupian professor who had stood at the head table at the banquet at Mooni, and who had later identified and befriended me at the Kuana jail. He was Hah Babbuh, Professor of Mechanics, head of the department to which I was attached.

He now sat at my right, and we speedily became great friends, a fact which was shortly to play an important part in my life and in the history of the whole planet.

It was on his recommendation that I had been assigned to his department by the Minister of Work.

Time sped rapidly during the succeeding days. My duties, which consisted in machine design, were interesting, though a bit out of my line. Of the twelve parths which make up a Porovian day, about four were required for sleep, and only two for work, thus leaving six, the equivalent of nearly twelve earth hours, for meals and recreation.

Recreation is the chief vocation of Cupia, and is conducted under the direction of the Minister of Play, who is the most important member of the king's cabinet.

I was duly assigned to a "hundred," or athletic club, consisting normally of one hundred and forty-seven members, under the leadership of an elective pootah, assisted by two bar-pootahs. The hundreds are grouped together by twelves, into thousands, each led by an elective eklat; and so the grouping continues on the analogy of the defunct armies of the Cupian nations which existed prior to the great war of the Formian conquest. As I have already intimated, a similar organization obtains in the imperial air navy of the ant-men.

The games are mostly athletic in their nature, consisting in running, jumping, throwing stones at a mark, strap-dueling with blunt knives dipped in pitch, wrestling, *et cetera*. Sons normally enter their father's hundred as soon as there is a vacancy, and wives and daughters are organized into auxiliary hundreds. Teams, representing each hundred, compete annually within their thousand, the winning teams compete within their regiment, and so on up. Badges are awarded to the final winners, and a special prize to the hundred whose members capture the most badges. Then there is competitive marching in complicated evolutions in squads of twelve, conducted by each hundred as a whole.

This organized recreation is entirely optional, except as to the marching, which in my hundred occurred only twice a sangth, *i.e.*, every sixty days; so I had plenty of time to spend as I saw fit. I made frequent visits to the Department of Electricity, and became quite intimate with its professor, Oya Buh.

I also became acquainted with Ja Babbuh, Professor of Mathematics.

The observatory fascinated me. Never for a moment is the huge telescope, with its revolving cylinder of mercury, left unguarded. Here sits constantly Buh Tedn, or one of his assistants, while four students scan the sky for an occasional rift in the

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clouds. This vigil, maintained throughout the ages, and a similar vigil at Mooni, have resulted in a knowledge of space comparable with ours, in spite of the clouds which envelope Poros. The Porovians have long been of the opinion that both Mars and the Earth are inhabited, but that the other planets are not.

Constant demands were made on me to lecture before the students, and to submit to physical examinations; but, as all this came during my work time, it did not interfere with my recreation.

The wing of the palace devoted to Lilla and her attendants, lay near to my quarters and not far from the machine shop, and could be reached by an outside door without passing through the rest of the palace. Thither I came as a frequent visitor, by invitation of the princess. In fact, to be perfectly frank, I spent nearly my entire spare time there.

She had an unquenchable sunny disposition, and a keen sense of humor. She had no particular accomplishments, and yet possessed that trait, often overlooked and yet more valuable than any mere parlor tricks, of tactfulness, sympathy, ability to smooth over the rough places of life, and to enrich with her personality every gathering which she favored with her presence.

I certainly was on the top of the world —or rather of the planet Poros—and to make my contentment complete my old ant friend Doggo was detailed as attaché of the Formian ambassador, and brought with him my pet buntlote and Lilla's pet mathlab, which we had left behind in Wautoosa.

MEANWHILE my scientific attainments were attracting considerable attention, until finally Lilla informed me that her father had reached the conclusion that these attainments would furnish an excuse for elevating me to the lesser nobility. The *real* basis for my elevation was of course my rescue of the princess, but the king had not dared to give this reason, for fear of offending the sensibilities of Queen Formis.

In due course of time my promotion occurred, and I became a barsarkar, entitled to wear a red circle over where my heart ought to be, i. e., on the right side of my toga.

Lilla gave a special dinner to celebrate this, and invited Bthuh and Poblath. In fact, she was always getting up special occasions on one pretext or another, for she was very fond of devising new ways of cooking alta and mathlab and the red lobsterlike aphid-parasite, and of trying these dishes on her friends.

We played at a four-handed game resembling checkers, and a pleasant time was had by all. After the game we sat on a little veranda in the warm, soft evening air, two pairs of lovers blissfully happy.

Doggo had not been invited. He would not have fitted in. Being a sexless female, what could he know of love? And then, too, I had begun to learn that, except in educational circles, where "science knows no national boundaries," there was very little fraternizing between the Cupians and their conquerors. The social barrier between Doggo and me, which resembled the pale between our two countries, was the only drawback to an otherwise idyllic life.

But, as Poblath would say: "The cloudiest day may have its sunshine," meaning just the opposite to our "every cloud has its silver lining." For one day I received a letter from King Kew announcing, as a special mark of his favor, my betrothal to —the Duchess Bthuh!

Horrified, I rushed to the apartments of my Princess, and obtained entrance. She, too, had heard the news, and was in tears.

"My rank or not, Bthuh or no Bthuh, you are mine, mine!" she sobbed as she clung to me, while I covered her with kisses. "If it were not for Yuri and your criminal record, we could flee into Formia; but here in Cupia my father is supreme. If you were still a commoner, you could marry or not as you chose, within your own class; but as a barsarker you must marry as the king directs."

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"Isn't there anything we can do about it?" I demanded.

"Nothing," she replied. "A princess cannot marry lower than a full sarkar, which is a rank that you can attain only by performing some distinguished service for your country. Our only hope lies in accepting our fate for the present, and in striving to get you a sarkarship before the wedding. And think of poor Bthuh! This will be as much of a blow to her and to Poblath as it is to us."

But, to our surprise and consternation, Bthuh took the news very philosophically.

"The king's will be done," said she with a pretty little pout and shrug. "Myles Cabot is not a bad match after all; and, if rank prevents him from having the princess and prevents me from having the mango, why not solace ourselves with each other?"

And she glanced shyly up at me.

But somehow the idea did not appeal to me at all.

I must have looked at Bthuh with much the same expression of horror as the princess had worn the day of our first meeting at Wautoosa when I was still an unkempt earth man, for Bthuh laughed and said: "Come, come, Myles, do not look thus. Am I so horrible that you cannot learn to love me, even to please our gracious king?"

"Bthuh! Stop that foolishness at once!" ordered Lilla. "You make me sick."

But Bthuh insolently replied: "Cannot I flirt with my own betrothed, O princess?" She left the room, smiling.

"She is merely trying to hide a broken heart," I apologized.

Whereat Lilla wheeled on me furiously and said: "Don't you dare stand up for that creature!"

So I desisted.

I certainly was in a fix! Engaged to a girl whom I did not love, but who had apparently determined to put up with me. Estranged from the girl whom I did love. Forced to play false with the first man who had befriended me in Cupia. And no way out in sight. What was I to do?

I thought of renouncing my rank. But this, I found, was impossible; and, besides, such a step would put the princess even further out of my reach.

Bthuh bore up nobly; much too nobly, in fact.

Poblath sent me a brief note reading: "I expected no gratitude, but I did expect a square deal," and then refused to receive me when I hastened to the mang-ool to explain.

I took Hah Babbuh into my confidence, but he had no suggestion to offer, for I had as yet done nothing to deserve a sarkarship.

As time passed I saw less and less of Lilla and more and more of Bthuh, but I managed to keep from being left alone with the latter.

The date for our wedding was set, and drew nearer and nearer. We were to be married in state by the king himself. I could not help admitting that my bride was an exquisite creature. But I did not, could not, love her; though, if I had never met the Princess Lilla, I could doubtless have lived very happily with Bthuh. But how can the eagle's lover mate with a parakeet?

At last the eve of my wedding arrived. After supper I dragged my footsteps to the quarters of the princess, to spend with her the last few parths which I should ever be free to spend, for on the morrow I was to become a married man. Bthuh, my affianced bride, met me, and the princess was nowhere to be seen.

"Oh, Cabot, Cabot," entreated Bthuh as she seized my hands and gazed into my eyes. "Cannot you bow to the inevitable? Is life with me such a horrible fate? I can be very sweet if you will but let me try. You have never once kissed me yet. Is that the way to treat your betrothed? Kiss me, Cabot, kiss me, kiss me, kiss me!"

And, still holding me with her amber eyes, she slid her hands up my arms and drew her fragrant presence close to me.

But I broke away abruptly from her spell and demanded: "Where is my prin-

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cess? Surely you will not rob me of my last few hours of freedom."

Bthuh shrugged her pretty shoulders. "Your princess, it is always your princess! Well, what should I care? For tomorrow you are mine, wholly mine, and even a princess will not pirate the husband of a sarkari. Find her yourself and gather flowers while it yet is day." And with another shrug she left the salon.

"Tomorrow? Why, tomorrow I may be myself with yesterday's seven thousand years," I quoted softly as I pulled the signal cord for the maid.

The maid informed me that her mistress had not been seen since early morning. It was not like Lilla thus to leave her whereabouts unknown for such a long time. Instantly I suspected foul play. So I rushed out into the streets and began to make inquiries.

If I had been less agitated I suppose that I would have been more systematic; but as it was, I soon learned from a pinqui that the princess had been seen walking southward over the plaza shortly before noon. So I hastened down to the plaza and started questioning people.

At last my search was rewarded, for several people reported that they had seen a woman apparently much agitated, picked up by an ant-man and carried southward. So, hiring a kerkool at the nearest garage, I started in pursuit.

A few stads outside the city I came upon an ant kerkool lying beside the road. Gyroscope trouble, evidently. I parked my car and got out to investigate.

As I was standing there gazing at the fallen kerkool, a bandage was suddenly thrown around my eyes from behind. Then I smelled the pungent anaesthetic fumes of decoction of saffra root, and my struggles ceased.

CHAPTER XIV

IN DISGRACE

I AWAKENED to find myself lying bound in a wood. The time was apparently the next morning. My first thought was to worry about Lilla. My next was to wonder who was to blame for my seizure. Yuri, undoubtedly.

But, if so, had he not misplayed? If he had let me alone, I should by this time be marrying the Sarkari Bthuh; and, once married to her, I could no longer interfere between Lilla, and Yuri, who might even consent to marry the princess out of pique.

My thoughts were interrupted by the return of my captor, who proved to be an ant-man, numbered 356-1-400. He was a young ant, and bore no duel numbers. I started to speak, but he warned me to be silent; to make sure of my obedience, he bit me savagely. Once more, as on my first day on this planet, I experienced intense pain, followed by oblivion, and then by conscious paralysis.

When I awoke paralyzed, I found that my captor was carrying me. The fact that he was an ant-man confirmed my suspicions of Yuri. But the fact that he was carrying me furtively through the woods, instead of on the main highway, convinced me that I was still in Cupia.

My bonds were still on, but had become very loose. Immediately I decided that my one chance of escape lay in concealing my recovery from the paralysis, when this recovery should occur. So I awaited my opportunity.

Thus we proceeded for about a parth and a half, when suddenly my captor halted and pricked up his antennae. I too listened. Directly ahead of us there came a long-drawn howl, the call of a woofus. Nearer came the sound.

We were in a field at the time, and I could see that the ant-man was looking around for a likely tree, in which to take refuge. But the bordering woods were all scrub, with not a single sizable tree in sight, so my captor laid me down and advanced toward the sound of the oncoming woofus, evidently determined to bluff it out and to attack before being attacked.

Then the purple terror bounded into the open. One lone ant-man is no match for a woofus. My captor fought bravely, but

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he was slowly driven back, contesting every parastad of the way. When the two were nearly upon me, I realized that my languor was gone. I undid my bonds. I stood erect. Then I found a heavy stick.

My captor was entirely engrossed in his conflict. Now was my chance to crush him with my club, and then escape while the woofus devoured his remains. Fate was indeed kind to me once more. So I crept stealthily forward, and then brought my club down with a crash on the head of—

The woofus. For my sense of fair play, my sporting sense, had abruptly changed my mind, and I had rescued the underdog, instead of killing him. Now I was again his captive, undoubtedly destined this time to have eggs laid in me by Queen Formis.

The ant-man stood for a moment astounded, and then wheeled around. I still held my club. There was now no reason why I should not kill him too, if I could. But he did not charge.

Instead he said: "Let us not fight. You have saved my life, and so I owe you yours. 'A life for a life.' No one shall ever say that 356-1-400 is ungrateful. Go in peace. Look, a mist approaches. My excuse shall be that I lost you in the fog. If you too are grateful, you will tell the same story."

Then the fog, a frequent phenomenon of Poros, closed upon me, and I saw my captor no more. I lay down, covered myself with tartan leaves to keep off the wet, and waited for the fog to lift.

And the next thing I knew, it was morning.

In spite of my long fast—since supper two days ago—I felt refreshed by my sleep, and at once set out through the woods in as nearly a straight line as I could, in the hope of striking a road. The straight line was easy, as the eastern sky was still faintly pink; and likewise it was easy to head north along the road, when I finally reached one. But when at last I came to a city, it turned out to be Ktuth rather than Kuana.

BEFORE seeking food or anything else, except a much-needed drink of water, I found a pinqui and asked him if he had heard any recent news from Kuana, relative to the disappearance of the princess.

"News from Kuana? Disappearance?" he repeated in surprise. "Surely not. The princess has been here safe and sound for two days, and left only a few paraparths ago by the Kuana road!"

So I had just missed her! If I had entered the city a bit later, I should have passed her on the road!

My tickets were not sufficient to hire a kerkool; and besides, now that I knew Lilla was safe, I was in no hurry to face Bthuh, whom I had left waiting at the joining-stand, as it were. So, after breakfast, I set out on foot for Kuana, thirty stads away, carrying some lunch.

Around noon, when I had just eaten my lunch on a stone by the side of the road, a kerkool passed me, headed for Kuana. I hailed its single occupant, and was given a lift the rest of the way. He turned out to be the Chief of Pinquis of the Ktuth, bound for a conference with the mango of Kuana. I welcomed the chance to get inside the Kuana jail, face to face with my old friend Poblath, for this opportunity would enable me to give him my long-deferred explanation of my relations—or rather lack of relations—with his Bthuh.

It was three days since I had shaved, and I must have presented an uncanny sight. In fact, the Chief had intimated as much, as I got aboard his kerkool. So, when Poblath saw me, his jaw dropped, and he seemed convulsed with fear.

"Go away, dead man," he begged. "I confess it all. I did hire the ant-man to assassinate you. But, now that you have my confession, return in peace to the land beneath the boiling seas, and leave me alone!"

So *that* was why I had been kidnaped! Well, at least it let Yuri out of being an absolute fool.

"Poblath, old friend," I replied, "I am

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not dead. The ant-man lost me in the fog. And I have returned, not to curse you, but rather to thank you, for you have saved me from an unwished marriage."

And then I got across the explanation, which he had so long denied me. When I had finished, there was no longer any doubt in Poblath's mind that I was still his friend; and he warmly patted my jaw, the conventional Porovian token of friendship.

But I fancied that his sweetheart, Bthuh, would not be so easy to appease.

From the jail I went to my rooms for a shave and a clean toga, and then repaired to the garage where I had rented the kerkool, my intention being to try and arrange to pay for the loss on the installment plan.

But to my surprise, the kerkooloolo informed me that my kerkool had been found, with its gyros still running, standing beside the wrecked ant-car, and had been brought back to Kuana intact, so that all I owed was an extra day's rent, for which he would gladly trust me until next ticket-day.

On returning again to my rooms, I found a messenger with a peremptory summons to attend the king forthwith, in spite of the fact that it was now nearly time for the evening meal. Evidently, old Kew had heard of my return.

He had!. When I entered the audience chamber, I entered the presence of an awful wrath. Kew was seated on his royal couch, and standing beside him was a shee-woofus named Bthuh. Never before had I so stirred a woman's rage, and I hope never to do so again.

The king demanded an explanation, which I gave readily enough, but which did not convince him in the least.

"Cabot Barsarkar," he spoke, "I do not believe you. Concern for the safety of the princess is very commendable. But, if it were that which actuated you, you would have inquired first from me, and would have learned that she had left a note with me, giving word of her departure for Ktuth.

"No, you took the absence of the princess as a mere convenient excuse to desert your bride at the joining-stand, unmindful of the high honor which I was conferring on you in giving the hand of a sarkari to you, lately a commoner, nay, even a beast from another world. Whether or not she will still have you, is for the lady to say; but, as for me, you have greatly incurred the royal displeasure, and I am almost minded to revoke your rank. You came to us from among those accursed Formians, under whose thraldom I am chafing. Verily, I believe the ancient proverb: 'No good cometh out of Formia.' Go! I have spoken."

"But *I* have not spoken," interjected Bthuh, ever the disrespectful. "Know, base earth-thing, that no one can injure the pride of Bthuh with impunity. You who could have given me your love, or even merely your hand, and have received in return a love, the passion of which is unequaled on this planet, chose instead to mete out to me, who am your social superior, the worst insult which a man can give to a woman.

"I condescend to link myself with a commoner, and for reward am treated as dirt, am ground under heel like a brink. Never can you wipe out this insult. Never shall I reconsider my present determination not to marry you."

"For this relief, much thanks," said I to myself.

"But you still have me to cope with," she continued, "you brink! Mathlab! Earth-man!"

A particularly delicate touch, putting "earth-man" as the climax of a list of distasteful creatures!

"Bthuh will have her revenge," she concluded "never fear. Now *I* have spoken."

I drew a long breath, as one who has just finished receiving a flogging. So *that* was over. (The lady is now a very good friend of mine, and begs me to tone down this transcription of her tirade. But why not tell the story just as it happened?)

As I respectfully withdrew from the audience chamber, an attendant softly radiated into my antennae that the prin-

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cess desired to see me at once in her apartments. More trouble!

But I was wrong; for Lilla received me most tenderly and graciously. Supper was laid for two. I took her in my arms.

AT LAST we seated ourselves side by side on a couch by the table, and the meal was served.

"I was unable to bear your marriage to another," she explained, "especially as you did not seem to be trying to do anything about it."

"But how can a mathlab struggle in the jaws of a woofus?" I interjected, quoting one of Poblath's proverbs.

Lilla smiled indulgently, and continued her story. "There was no one here whom I could trust, so I finally called upon Doggo. He met me on the outskirts of the city, and carried me to Ktuth in his kerkool; then returned to Kuana, to try and devise with you some means of escaping from Bthuh. But his kerkool broke down en route, and he had to continue on foot; and, by the time that he reached the city, you had disappeared. When you failed to show up for the wedding, Bthuh acted like one drunk with saffra-root, and has continued so ever since. Doggo sent word to me at Ktuth, and I returned."

Then I told her of *my* adventures, she sympathizing tenderly with my misfortunes, and thrilling at my conquest of the woofus.

"Now that Poblath is our friend again, we have little to fear from Bthuh," she said. "Bthuh is a mad little wanton, and will cool off if let alone. But Poblath, for all his philosophy, is a commoner, and so was to have been expected to misunderstand the situation."

I wanted to say that Lilla herself had entertained exactly the same misunderstanding as Poblath, but instead I merely remarked: "I too am a commoner, Lilla dearest."

"You are not!" she indignantly replied, "you are a barsarkar, and have the heart of a king. Could the Princess Lilla love a commoner?"

"The Princess Lilla once spent a whole night in the arms of a commoner," I remonstrated.

"And was just as safe and free from insult as she would have been in the arms of her mother," she added. "But Yuri believed otherwise, or said that he did; and threatened that, unless I would by my silence assent to his version of my rescue, he would tell the king, who would have believed the worst and would have cast me out. So, as long as I thought that you were hopelessly doomed, I held my peace. But I was very sad."

After the meal, Lilla and I sat for a long time together on her little balcony, discussing plans.

"I shall marry you," assented my princess, "even if we have to flee together to islands beyond the boiling seas."

That was all very well, but quite impractical. The boiling seas were impassable—unapproachable even. Formia was barred to us by my criminal record, and by the presence and influence there of Yuri. Cupia was barred to us by the wrath of King Kew, due to my treatment of his favorite. And Formia and Cupia constituted the entire world. For us to hide disguised was impossible, because of my own earth born deformities.

So, although I gloried in Lilla's love, my joy was sobered by a realization that marriage between us was impossible.

And what about the situation when King Kew should die, and Prince Yuri should succeed to the crown? We had that to look forward to.

CHAPTER XV

A NEW GAME

BUT with Lilla's love and trust, I could not despair. As I kissed her good night, with her warm throbbing girlish body held fast in my arms, a singe star shone down upon us for an instant, through a rift in the circumambient clouds. Was it my own planet, the earth? I wondered.

During the succeeding days I saw much of Lilla and nothing of Bthuh. And ever I racked my brains for an idea which

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should point the way out of my difficulties. My only hope was to perform such a distinguished service for my adopted country that the king would relent, would forgive me, and would promote me to the rank of sarkar.

The most distinguished service which a Cupian can render is to invent a new and popular game, so I set about to do something in that line. And at last the idea came, a whiz of an idea! As Hah Babbuh, head of the Department of Mechanics, had advised me to seek this means of distinction, so it was to him that I first confided my plans.

At my request, Prince Toron, who had aided me so efficiently in devising my radio set in the laboratories of Mooni, was detailed to assist me in this new endeavor. He and a young draftsman and a young chemist set to work with me to build the new game.

And what was this new game? Target shooting with army rifles. Explosives were already known on Poros, being used for blasting and for airplane bombs. With the aid of the young chemist, I adapted these explosives to be sufficiently slow burning to drive a rifle without injuring the gun.

In a surprisingly short time we had turned out a crude rifle which would actually shoot. The heads of the Mathematics and Astronomy Departments, Ja Babbuh and Buh Tedn, were then let in on the secret, for the purpose of computing trajectories and designing the sights and wind leaf, which they did by an adaption of the principles employed in computing the orbits of celestial bodies.

A hundred and forty-seven rifles were then turned out and presented to my athletic club.

My club tried out the rifles; and, when at last they began to get bull's-eyes, they went wild over the new sport. The king heard, and relented sufficiently to send for me and compliment me.

After being thoroughly tried out in my hundred, rifle shooting was next introduced into the clubs to which my three assistants belonged, and became popular there, as well. The idea spread, and soon all the clubs throughout the kingdom were clamoring for guns. The mechanical laboratory at Kuana was made over into a huge arsenal, and the chemical laboratory into a huge munition factory, while the athletic clubs of Kuana and the vicinity detailed some of their members to work overtime in my two plants. Cupians will always work overtime in the cause of play.

Target practice soon became the national sport of Cupia. The craze even reached such dimensions that Queen Formis finally dispatched a special mission to Kuana to study the movement and report whether it could not be put to some practical use. The report of that mission is now one of my most treasured possessions, and a framed reproduction of their conclusions now hangs upon my office wall.

The ant mission concluded, and so reported to their queen, that the new game had absolutely no practical application, but that if it kept the crazy Cupians quiet and took their minds off their troubles, it might prove a valuable contribution toward simplifying the enforcement of the treaty of Mooni. And so, indeed, it seemed. Toron neglected politics to become a proficient shot, and his anti-Formian movement rapidly subsided. All of which was exactly as I had planned.

The collapse of the Toron movement so pleased the exiled Prince Yuri that he sent a special ambassador to his brother, offering to assist in introducing the new sport to the Cupians at Mooni. But "I fear the Greeks even when bearing doughnuts," as we used to say at Harvard. So Yuri's kind offer was declined. We did, however, present a sample rifle and some of our powder to the authorities of the Imperial University of the ant-men at their request, for we could not very well refuse.

FINALLY King Kew himself condescended to sit in at the conferences between Hah Babbuh, Buh Tedn, Ja Babbuh, Toron, and myself. He had been brooding a good deal recently on the indignities inflicted on his people by Queen

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Formis, with whom he had had several disputes lately; and the committee-work seemed to divert and cheer him up greatly. But still I was not made a sarkar, although I learned from Lilla that Hah Babbuh had urged this on the king. The influence of Bthuh Sarkari was still to strong. In fact, it was rumored that she now aspired to make herself Queen of Cupia.

Well, I did not mind. Better even one of *her* sons on the throne than Yuri!

Having got the new game well under way, I next turned to my old love, radio. First I obtained some stones from the Howling Valley, which was easy, because of my deafness to Hertzian waves; but I was unable to put them to any practical use. Then I devised a simple wave trap for absorbing the ordinary carrying waves of Porovian speech. Also I arranged a variable condenser, which could so alter the capacity of the Cupian antennae that selective sending and reception were possible.

These two devices were combined in a small box which could easily be carried on a man's head and be coupled to his antennae. My third invention on these lines was a broadcasting set, whereby the normal Cupian sending range of four parastads—about fifty yards—was increased to half a stad—about half a mile.

And now, in my frantic quest for a sarkarship, I introduced a still further new game, namely marching evolutions on an extended scale. Strictly speaking, this was really an adaptation of an old game, rather than the creation of a new, for marching formations had always been popular in Cupia; but my three new radio devices made it possible to perform these evolutions by twelves of thousands.

We tried it out in our own twelve thousand. The commander broadcast his orders to the selectively tuned headsets of the eklats, and they in turn to the pootahs, each of whom then directed his hundred at ordinary wave length. The regimental evolutions went through like clockwork, and *this* idea spread to the other twelve thousands of the country.

But still I was not made a sarkar.

I then turned my attention to the construction of two huge engines, one of which we mounted on a kerkool and one on a concrete base in the courtyard of the university machine shop. The purpose of these engines was for the present kept secret. But I had a feeling that they would win me the sarkarship, even if everything else failed.

As a result of my inventions, King Kew sufficiently unbent to invite me to occupy the reviewing stand with him on Peace Day, when the annual athletic prize giving was to take place. This was a signal honor which even sarkars might envy, but it was not a sarkarship.

The morning of the five hundredth anniversary of the Peace of Mooni—three hundred and fifty-eighth in Porovian notation—dawned clear and dazzling. By 460 o'clock—9:00 o'clock in earth time—the whole plaza and the fields were jammed with marching clubs.

The Minister of Play, who stood with me on the reviewing platform at the crest of University Hill—along with the rest of the cabinet, Prince Toron, and a few leading nobles and professors—sadly remarked that he was afraid the maneuvers would have to be given up.

I replied with a smile that I guessed not; though he was unable to figure out how evolutions could be possible with that huge crowd.

Pistol shooting had recently been introduced as a tentative subject for next year's games, and our committee of five all wore revolvers strapped to our sides, as a special badge in recognition of our responsibility for the gala occasion.

The housetops and roads were crowded with Cupian femininity. All was ready for the grand opening. I adjusted the controls of the big sending set, and dispatched Poblath, who had been detailed as my aide for the day, to inform the king that the time had arrived for his address.

As Kew XII stepped up on the stand, at just 500 o'clock—10.00 in earth time—practically the entire male population of

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Cupia gave him the United States Army present arms in absolute unison. It was an inspiring sight.

I noticed that the king seemed extremely pale and nervous, but I did not give this much thought at the time.

Then I yielded the sending set to him, and he began his speech of welcome, a very different speech from what had been expected, but one which will go down in history, and which every Cupian schoolboy throughout the ages will commit to memory, as American boys do the Gettysburg Address.

Thus spoke King Kew: "Three hundred and fifty-eight years ago today our forefathers submitted to the indignities of the treaty of Mooni, and the stigma of that infamous treaty attached to the Kew dynasty, which was then founded. For twelve generations, Cupia has been under the dominion of a race of animals—animals possessed of human intelligence, it is true, but still merely lower animals.

"Now the parth of our deliverance is at hand. Those rifles which you hold were designed not for play, but rather for the killing of Formians. The bullets which have been issued to you this day contain the highest explosive known to Porovian science. With these weapons you are invincible. Today, with your support, Cupia will become free, and the Kew Dynasty will wipe out forever the stigma of its birth.

"Are you men or slaves? If slaves, you will bow to Formis, your sons and descendants forever will wearily serve out their time in her workshops, she will have veto power over all your self-made laws, your present king will give his body as food for her maggots, and your future kings will cower before her. But if you be men, you will today offer up your lives for your country, that Cupia may at last be free!"

A murmur, as of an angry sea, arose from the crowd and smote upon my antennae. The sporting nature of the proposition appealed to them fully as much as any sentiments of patriotism.

THE king turned to me. I saluted. And, in front of that huge assemblage, he pinned upon my breast the long-forgotten insignia of field marshal of the armies of a nation. Simultaneously Prince Toron and the three professors displayed the insignia of general. Hah Babbuh stepped to my side as my chief of staff, while the other three donned their selective tuners and descended from the platform to take command of their several corps. The stage was all set for the final dénouement.

The king spoke again: "Let all Cupians who are willing to die for king and country raise their hands aloft."

Up shot every hand on the hill and plain below.

I seized the phones and shouted: "Then forward into ant land, for Cupia, King Kew, and Princess Lilla!"

"For Cupia, King Kew, and Princess Lilla!" shouted my army in reply, and the march toward Formia began.

But some Cupian had betrayed us, for at this instant there appeared, at the crest of the hill overlooking the city, a horde of ant-men, who debouched in perfect order on the fields beyond the plain. Thank God that they had not arrived before the king's speech!

But even as it was, things were bad enough; our advance companies recoiled in terror before the black assault. Five hundred years of servile peace are not well calculated to develop a nation of fighters. I saw Toron frantically trying to rally his troops, but in vain. It had been easy enough to plan to attack the ant-men, but five hundred years of submission had bred a tradition of Formian omnipotence, and this tradition at once revived when the Formians appeared.

I gazed with horror at the scene. Here were thousands upon thousands of presumably intelligent human beings, armed with the most powerful weapons which modern science could produce, and yet retreating in superstitious fear before a handful of unarmed ants. Had the high resolves of a few paraparths ago degenerated to this?

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Why didn't my men use their rifles? Let them fire a few shots, and they would realize their power.

So seizing the phones again I tuned them to Toron's wave-length, and radiated: "For God's sake stop! Never mind your whole army. Just hold two or three men. Get them to use their rifles on the enemy. Use your own pistol, too."

Toron did not know who God was, but he sensed the agony of my appeal, and he gathered the idea. Seizing the nearest Cupian by the shoulder, he swung him around, at the same time discharging his own revolver. An ant-man exploded.

The Cupian, fascinated, fired his own rifle with equal success. Then, at Toron's peremptory command, a few more of our men halted long enough to try their rifles on the enemy.

At each shot, one Formian exploded. The effect was splendid. Our men stopped, formed ranks again, opened fire, and advanced once more toward Formia. The tradition of Formian invincibility was destroyed forever.

Messengers now came with word that hundreds of kerkools were bringing up ant reenforcements over all the roads leading from the border. But what could jaws avail them against dum-dum bullets?

I learned later that the ants had attacked certain outlying towns of our country earlier in the day, expecting to make easy work of them, and to wreak a vengeance on the unprotected inhabitants. But our casualties there had been surprisingly light. In the village of Beem, in the Okarze Mountains, rocks were used on the attackers, and the chance remark, "Fine target practice!" had suggested to some bright local mind the use of rifles, with which the ant-men had been repulsed with ease. At Bartlap, one of the enemy had indiscreetly mentioned that rifles were the cause of the war, and immediately rifles were effectively produced. In most of the other instances the Formians had been recalled to reenforce the attack on Kuana.

Now a new development occurred, for a fleet of airships appeared on the horizon, and presently high explosive bombs began dropping with frightful havoc among my astounded troops, who once more broke and ran. In a few paraparths the planes would be over the city.

I dispatched Poblath on the run to the university, and soon my human sense of hearing was rewarded by a sharp crack-crack-crack from the Mechanics Building.

The first plane toppled and fell. The second. And then the third. The others, sensing a power beyond their ability to combat, wheeled and withdrew. Our armies reformed and once more advanced toward Formia. The first of my huge secret machines, an anti-aircraft gun, had spoken.

Soon messengers brought word that intense fighting was in progress for the possession of the Third Gate. Of course it would be many days before our forces could reach the western two gates, but the bulk of the populations of both countries lived near the Third Gate, due to the mountainous nature of the country to the west.

Then came news that the Formians at the Third Gate had been flanked by some of our men who had surmounted the pale with scaling ladders. The Third Gate fell into the hands of Cupia. Our victorious armies were on enemy soil.

It was war to the hilt! And it satisfied the sporting sense of all Cupia, that the Formians had invaded and attacked first.

A special detachment of Mooni-trained aviators and mechanics had gone at once to the three planes as soon as we had shot them down, and now one of them arose into the air fully repaired.

The moment had arrived for the final master stroke in the new Cupian national game—war. For the second huge machine in the courtyard of the Department of Mechanics was a sixteen inch barbette coast artillery rifle, which had been trained upon the Imperial City of the ant queen, by exact elevation and azimuth, carefully computed by Buh Tedn.

The huge gun boomed forth. Again and again it boomed, as our spotting plane re-

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ported for adjustment of fire. Finally, just at nightfall, the signal came to cease firing. The Imperial City, from which Queen Formis had been directing her troops, had been totally destroyed, and with it presumably the queen and her friend and ally, the renegade Yuri.

Our armies still pressed forward into Formia from air attack by the three repaired planes and by the anti-aircraft gun, which had been sent forward by kerkool. I was jubilant. But not so, apparently, King Kew.

"What is the matter, sir?" I asked. "Why do you look so sad on this glorious day of deliverance? Are you thinking of our poor boys who have fallen?"

"No," he replied, "I did not dare tell you before, for fear that your well known impetuousity would disrupt our plans. But now you can know. The Princess Lilla has been missing since morning. The fact that all of her clothes are intact, except her sleeping robe, leads me to think that she must have been kidnaped during the night."

"My God!" I ejaculated in English. Then turning the command over to Hah Babbuh, and instructing him to move his headquarters to the Third Gate in the morning, I hastened to the apartments of my sweetheart.

Bthuh met me there in tears and said: "My princess is dead! My princess is dead! Last night, through connivance with me, Prince Yuri drugged her with saffra root and spirited her away to the Imperial City of Formia. I knew all your plans, except the purposes of your two huge cannons, or I should have warned Yuri of those, too. I thought merely to spoil your victory and so gain my revenge. The old king, too, had spurned my amorous advances, and so I declared war on Cupia. But Cupia has won in spite of me, and as a punishment for my guilt my beloved mistress has been killed."

There could be no doubt of it. Every living thing in the city of the queen had been destroyed. My victory was turned to ashes. In despair I sank upon a couch.

But comforting arms stole around my shoulders, and a soft voice spoke in my antennae: "Cabot, can you ever forgive me? I love you so that I would willingly give back to you your princess, just to make you happy. But, alas, she is lost to us forever. Cannot we solace ourselves with love for each other? Cabot, Cabot, I love you so, my dear."

And her fragrant, voluptuous, intoxicating presence wrapped itself around my tired body and despondent soul.

CHAPTER XVI

CABOT TELLS THE WORLD

THERE on the same couch on which I had often caressed the Princess, I held in my arms her betrayer, the lovely Bthuh. So soon does love forget.

So soon love does *not* forget! Casting aside the seductive betrayer of my princess, I sprang to my feet, resolving never to give up hope until I actually saw Lilla's dead body, and even then to remain true to her in death. Bthuh's last chance had come and gone. She had played her last card and lost.

Although it was now night, I at once called my aide, and summoned a squad out of my own hundred, which had been retained as the king's bodyguard. Then, requisitioning a fleet of kerkools, we set out for the Imperial City, leaving Poblath with his former love, Bthuh.

"Tame her if you can, and good luck to you," was my parting admonition.

The trip was made in record time. By the light of our flash lamps we found that the ruins were guarded by several hundred ant-men; so we sent for reenforcements to be furnished in the morning, and then we bivouacked for the night, taking turns keeping awake and sniping at the enemy whenever they showed a light or came within the beams of ours.

Early in the morning, a company of Cupians reported to me, and we at once began the assault of the ruins, carrying our objective with but little difficulty.

Then came the individual fighting in

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the corridors, and in this the ant-men were not at so great a disadvantage. They ambushed our soldiers. They pushed rocks on them from above. And, all in all, they made away with nearly half our force, before the remaining handful of defenders broke and fled from the city.

Our survivors were put to work exploring. The mangled body of Queen Formis was hailed with joy, but no signs were discovered of either Yuri or Lilla, although occasionally we would come upon an enemy straggler and kill him.

Finally on rounding a turn, whom should I meet face to face but the ant-man who had let me go after I had rescued him from the woofus. I recognized him at once.

"Yahoo! Number 356-1-400," I hailed him, "a life for a life."

"Nay," he replied, "for you owe me nothing on that score. But if you will spare me, I will repay you well."

"Your life is already yours," I said.

"Then," said he, "I will lead you to the princess."

I could have embraced the uncouth creature for joy. But, suspecting a trap, I gathered nearly a squad of my soldiers before following the ant-man. He led us into the subterranean depths of the city. Several times we had to remove fallen fragments which barred our way, and once had to wait until explosives could be obtained to blast a passage. But at last we came within sight of an undamaged dungeon, where Lilla lay chained, alive and well.

Yet even as we hailed her through a crack in the débris, we saw two ant-men enter the dungeon through another passage, unchain the princess, and carry her away.

Quick as a flash I remembered my revolver, and opened fire through the crack, blasting one of her abductors. But as I drew a bead on the other, my weapon was knocked from my hand.

Turning angrily, I beheld our guide standing over me.

"I fulfilled my bargain," he said, "when I showed you the princess. Now I owe you no more. Those Formians are my fellow countrymen, and I have saved one of them, at least, from the horrible death."

"And lost me my princess," I shouted angrily.

We were now surrounded by my squad with drawn rifles, but they did not dare fire, for fear of hitting me. I was at the mercy of our guide. He had too much respect for the dum-dum bullets, however, and was easily hauled off of me and placed under arrest.

My men then proceeded to hack their way into the dungeon, and we at once followed the trail of the princess. This was not easy, for the city was a total wreck. A hundred ways presented themselves, through which her captor might have crawled. So we withdrew and threw a cordon around the entire city, dispatching a few searching parties again into the interior. This was made possible by additional reenforcements from headquarters.

As luck would have it, the ant-man finally made his appearance, with Lilla held tightly in his jaws, at the very point in the line of sentries where I happened to be. Instantly a dozen rifles covered him.

But he radiated the peremptory command: "Stop! Put down your rifles."

"Put them down," I ordered.

"Now," he continued, "if a rifle is raised again, I bite, and the princess dies. She lives only on condition that I am given safe passage, *with her as my prisoner*. Once within our lines she will be treated well, for she will prove a valuable hostage to support the demands of Formis for a return to power."

"Formis is dead," I objected.

"One Formis is dead," he replied. "But there are always maggots which we can fatten to make a new queen."

At this point Lilla interjected faintly: "Bite, oh, Formian, for I would die, rather than betray my country."

But I said: "You may proceed. Not a rifle will be raised against you, for the princess must be saved."

Nothing however had been said about

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revolvers, and evidently the ant-man was unacquainted with that weapon. As he passed through our lines, keeping a careful watch on the rifles of our sentries, I fired my revolver from the hip; and a moment later Lilla was clasped safely in my arms.

Tenderly we greeted each other. She was parched and hungry, and our first task was to give her food and drink, which were easily found among the ruins.

Then came explanations. She had awakened to find herself in the dungeon about noon of the day before. Yuri had informed her that the Cupian attack had been met and stopped, and that airplanes were about to destroy Kuana. Then he had been hurriedly called away, and she had seen no one since. She could hardly believe us when we told her that the attack had been a success, that Queen Formis was dead, and that the power of Formia was broken forever.

WHEN she had rested, I at once sent her home under guard in a kerkool, and myself proceeded to headquarters to learn how the war was progressing. Much as I longed to accompany her, my first duty was to my adopted country.

To Number 356-1-400, before leaving, I gratefully offered an honorable freedom in Cupia, but he scornfully replied that he would rather die fighting for his own country. I respected his attitude, and so gave him a safe-conduct through our lines to rejoin his own troops. Later in the war his number was reported to me as being among the casualties.

At headquarters I found Hah Babbuh in fine spirits. The power of Formia was broken indeed!

Wautoosa had fallen into our hands and, with it, a number of planes, which thus were added to our steadily growing air-force. Kerkools were patrolling all the roads, shooting ant-men at sight.

Hah was particularly jubilant over what had happened at Mooni. Early on Peace Day, the Cupian students had somehow received word of what was afoot. Joining with the slaves, they had slightly outnumbered the ant-men there present and had captured the University after a fierce struggle, thus preventing the ant-men from removing or destroying the priceless gems of knowledge stored there. When our vanguard arrived, our students were already in control.

In the days that followed, our advance progressed. City after city fell into our hands, in sufficient numbers and containing sufficient supplies, so that we did not have to give any thought to the quartering or feeding of our men. All that was necessary was a steady stream of ammunition proceeding from Kuana to our outposts.

I had given strict orders that Doggo and Yuri were to be taken alive, the former because I wished to spare him as a friend, the latter because I looked forward with extreme pleasure to seeing him executed for treason. But neither was captured. The numbers of all dead ant-men were taken and turned in, but Doggo's number was not among them. And to this day I do not know what became of him or of Yuri.

It was my ambition to exterminate the entire race of ant-men from the face of Poros, with the single exception of my friend Doggo. But this wish was not to be gratified. For, as the Formians retreated southward, our line of communication became more and more extended, and our troops more and more undisciplined.

Gradually the Formians obtained rifles, particularly from the two cities which they had bombed. Then they made a stand and sent out snipers, and this netted them more rifles.

Our people began to grumble. The widows and orphans of the slain did not appreciate the honor which had been thrust upon them. The sport-loving Cupians in the field chafed under military restraint, and demanded to be returned home to their games. And a considerable number of the populace were even heard to say that two years slavery to Formia was far better than a life-long slavery in the army of a military dictator

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—meaning the four or five weeks since the war had started.

So, reluctantly, King Kew concluded a new peace with what was left of Formia. A new pale was set up far to the south of the old. Formia had to bear the entire cost of the war. Ant-men were forbidden to carry arms or to enter Cupia, and all their airships were confiscated. The Kings of Cupia reserved a veto power over Formian laws forever. But King Kew wisely decided not to demoralize Cupia by the introduction of Formian slaves.

Our University set up a branch at Mooni, in order that the glamour of that name might not be lost. Our bravest soldiers, and our war widows, were rewarded by grants of land and of city residences in the captured territory, which almost completely alleviated the popular discontent.

Not until the treaty was concluded did I return from the field. The papers were signed in the same hall at Mooni which had witnessed the degradation of Cupia five hundred years ago; for "defeat is bitterest at the scene of a former victory," as Poblath remarked. And on the occasion of the present treaty, Kew, surrounded by his generals and in the presence of the signatories, was crowned King of all Poros. This idea, by the way, was due to Poblath, the philosopher, and it won him a barsarkarship, which came in very handy.

There was much decorating with medals and handing out of promotions. Needless to state, the king made me a sarkar; and the Assembly, not to be outdone, voted to make me a winko, or field marshal, for life!

NOW marriage was possible between Lilla and me. And also between Bthuh and Poblath, for Bthuh had proven to be a good sport and had finally accepted him; and, as Lilla had prophesied, Bthuh settled down and became a most quiet and domestic wife.

The proudest and happiest moment of my entire life was when, upon the joining-stand of Kuana in the presence of the assembled multitude, King Kew pronounced the words which made Lilla my wife.

We spent our honeymoon camping out on a most beautiful rocky island in the middle of Lake Luno, which lies nestled in the hills and surrounded by deep woods, about a thousand stads to the northward of Kuana. I had discovered the place by accident, while on an airplane trip to an isolated mountain community immediately after the war, for the purpose of conferring decorations on the first company which had stood its ground against the onslaught of the ant-men.

The walls of the island rise sheer some nine parastads from the water's edge, save where in one spot the sloping sward runs through a cleft in the rocks down to a sandy beach. The interior of the island slopes gently from the cliffs down from all sides to a little pond in the center, and is about equally divided between lawn and stately grove. Here Lilla and I plan to build.

Here we spent many golden days, swimming and fishing and climbing; but mostly just looking into each other's eyes.

At our first dip in the water, I was horribly embarrassed. In the first place, I had to shed my headset, which always puts me at a disadvantage. And, in the second place, my wings came unstuck and fell off, and my matted hair exposed my ears, so that I stood before her an earthman, with all my horrible earthly deformities. Yet, still she loved me.

Our honeymoon was idyllic and ideal. But all good things must end, and we finally had to return to the city to take up my duties, for added to my honors was a place in the Royal Cabinet as Minister of Play, the former incumbent having died during my absence.

I have various projects in hand for my adopted country. Already a network of radio stations is going up throughout the land. A systematic extermination of the whistling bee is under way by means of anti-aircraft artillery. Various earth devices are being tested out in our labora-

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tories as fast as I can recall them to memory. And I have resumed, but with great precautions, my experiments on the wireless transmission of matter, in which work Toron is assisting.

Lilla and I occupy her old suite in the palace, and entertain constantly; among our most frequent guests are my old friend Poblath and his completely tamed wife.

But often I wonder what has become of Doggo and Yuri. In spite of present prosperity, Cupia is not safe, if the renegade prince still lives on the planet. But I hope that Doggo survives, and that we shall meet again.

Fate now seems to be through with its hard knocks. But, happy as I am, I occasionally wonder what is going on in dear old Boston, whether America's World War allies ever repaid the billions which they borrowed, whether our country joined the League of Nations in time to save the world from another European menace, etc., etc. And I have a yearning to write home.

Of course, the obvious step for me was to attempt communication by radio, so I built a particularly powerful sending set with long wave length. But the lack of any reply convinced me that my signals were not being received on earth.

So recently I got together my old committee of five: Hah Babbuh, Buh Tedn, Ja Babbuh, Toron and myself; and together we designed a super gun and a streamline projectile, and computed the necessary powder-charge and principles of aiming, so that we could shoot the projectile to the earth.

Then I prepared this manuscript in quadruplicate, with three of which copies I shall try to reach the world. For this purpose, each copy will be placed in a gold cylinder and be swathed in the fur of the fire-worm, that peculiar creature which dares to live almost at the edge of the boiling seas, because its matted fur is the most perfect insulator against heat known on Poros.

The swathed cylinder will then be packed into the interior of the projectile, and a covering put on, especially calculated to resist the devouring heat of passage through the atmospheres of the two planets. The projectile will be weighed, its center of gravity will be determined, and its moments of inertia will be tested, the firing data being corrected accordingly. It will be placed in the gun. Then, at exactly the appointed time, the gun will be discharged, and may God speed my message on its way to you, my earth-brethren.

Myles S. Cabot.

THE END

Prof. Farley's other great science fiction stories in the group are "The Radio Beasts," "The Radio Planet," and "The Radio Menace," which are sequels to this story.

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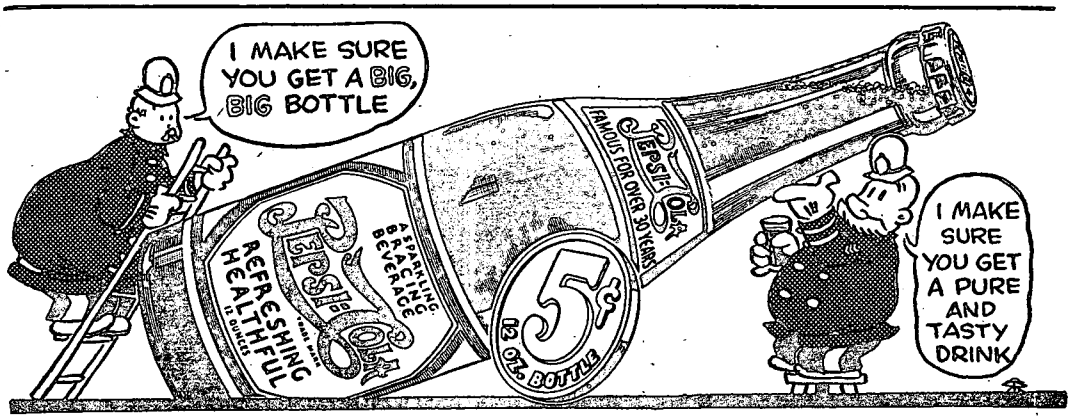
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The Kiss of Death

By LAURA WITHROW

There are all kinds of kisses—of love, of friendship, of peace, of brotherhood. And there is the Judas kiss. This author tells a startling story of still another kind

I AM happy this morning. Not even when I was a care-free child did the blood pulse so gaily through my veins.

My heart is beating time to music in my soul that is as joyous as are the songs of birds; music that sings one triumphant refrain:

"It is over. You are free. You are FREE!"

While every nerve and fibre of my being is thrilling with that exultant, welcome song, Nature herself gives a token she understands and is rejoicing with me.

That crimson and gold radiance, widening and deepening—the dividing line between night and day, tells me in the Great Mother's mystic, silent language that happiness is to come. That rainbow splendor, brightening the dull, gray earth, is an omen of joy, of love and peace.

I believe in omens.

Had I heeded Nature's warnings, I would never have been his wife; but let that pass. Those strange, sad bitter days are over and must be forgotten. I turn now to the future that waits, rich with promise.

Before permitting mind and heart to run riot along the golden pathway I will tread, I must see him under the grassy earth on the hillsides, and over him a marble shaft, its presence a reminder that the past is dead; its white finger pointing heavenward, as a suggestion of the life and joy to come.

As I close the door on all that should not have been; that might have been so different, I will wear black of the most somber dye, so that the world may see how I am sorrowing for my husband.

I will hide my Great Secret, just as I hid my fierce heartaches from its impertinent gaze. One bares the heart only to those who understand—through love.

They, his own people, in the hour after It was over, found me wearing a filmy white gown, redolent with the perfume of dead years. I wore it last in my girlhood days. The fancy occurred to me that by putting it on I might blot out the unhappy married life between the Then and Now, and be a girl again.

My black robes lay in a neglected heap on the floor, and in my shimmering draperies I was pacing restlessly up and down the room, eyes and mind and heart wandering in the Land of Happy Dreams.

Sadly they watched me, and tried to speak words of consolation. At last I persuaded them to go away, and then I turned the key. When alone I waved my white arms with glee, and laughed—softly, lest they hear. It was such a relief to be free, after those years of bondage! I laughed and cried in one breath for joy.

Then, wearing that fleecy robe, and pinning a bunch of red roses at my breast, symbol of the new life pulsing within me, I studied myself in the mirror to see whether the inner woman, the soul of me, had thrown off the shackles.

The transformation was weird and wonderful. It was as if you had taken a delicate brush and painted out the lines of grief and care left by the sun on the daguerreotype of a woman who had known years of pain and sorrow.

In that hour of freedom my features softened. The burden fell from me. The roses of youth bloomed in my cheeks. The light of youth shone now in my eyes. I smiled back at the radiant vision and promised it life's best gifts—peace, contentment, love.

When, decorously clad in deepest black, I passed the portal of my doorway, I dared not let them look into my eyes, fearing the triumphant light I knew was there,

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would betray me, and tell the heart's truth—that I was happy. Never before had I known such happiness because he was lying down there in the dark drawing-room, dead to earth's voices evermore.

I am free, free!

I could chant the words until they would ring far above the harsh roll of the sea, and the shrill voices of the winds . . .

Yet in the first hours after he passed on there were fear-haunted moments. I found myself listening for footsteps—*his* footsteps, and an icy hand clutched my heart. It seemed as if he were living, and in another instant would be by my side, the old, mocking, sneering smile in his eyes and on his lips. That was only yesterday, though if I count time by heart-throbs, it was years ago.

To drive away his spirit, if it were lingering in the old, familiar places, I asked them to leave me. I would spend the last night alone with my husband.

With eyes speaking sympathy, and imploring me to be brave and calm, they slipped away, and left me among the shadows.

NOW I was alone with the dead; my dead!

It was such a new and delicious experience to be beyond his power. Long I studied the white face. Death had been kind. The spirit had taken with it the evil that fast was molding the helpless clay. I was shown the man my husband was meant to be, the man he might have been.

The sneer was gone from the curved lips which told Love's tale. The hard lines had faded from the face. With the frown gone that had become habitual in life, nobleness sat on the broad, high brow. It was a weird metamorphosis. He was younger, and was again the lover, now that he belonged to Death.

But this change did not make me sorry. It only steeled my heart still more against him. It showed at this late day all he might have been to me.

With folded arms I walked around the still figure, watching it and thinking of the girlhood hopes and dreams of happiness, which one by one he trampled under ruthless, cruel feet, with mocking laughter for my youth and inexperience; for my fantasies, my castles in the air. The wasted years and my darkened life, all his work, confronted me.

Suddenly I felt that he was near. My heart stood still, but not with fear; repulsion, rather. It was as if he could put out his hand and touch me, and I felt the old horror at the mere thought of physical contact.

Then it occurred to me that even with the added power death gives the spirit, he might not know I had conquered. He might not understand that I had sent his soul away, and thus freed myself from that unholy bondage.

I wanted him to know. To tell him would be my revenge for all that I had suffered. His death was retribution, but this would be revenge! Now was my chance. With the empty shell between us I would tell him. I knew that he was hovering over the white face watching me, so I stood at the feet and faced him. And in my eyes was the triumphant joy that was singing in my heart.

"You are dead, dead, dead," I chanted to that spirit creature.

"Do you know what that means? You are *There* and I am *Here*. The barrier between us you may never pass. *You* are not my husband. I will bury that which lies between us now, with the pomp and circumstance due the man I married. Then I will forget you; or, if I remember, it will be with exultant joy, because you have passed to your own place, and I am in my own. Oh, I am so happy!"

Suddenly there were queer, rustling noises around me, as of swinging draperies, and an icy blast struck me full in the face. I became cold from head to feet, just as when he was alive and near. Then I was certain he heard and understood, and I laughed mockingly.

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"But that is not all I want to tell you," I continued, in low, measured bell-like tones, that vibrated strangely in the still room; tones that had in them the echo of music, but the finality of death itself.

"*I* did it. *I* killed your earth life and sent you wandering on your dark way. Do you hear? *I*, your wife, the womman you thought you owned, body and soul and spirit!

"Do you not recollect, I told you more than once when you were cruel that I would kill you some time? And you answered me sneeringly, reminding me of my forgiving spirit.

"You knew me too well to fear such a threat. I wanted to do right. I would be sorry for my wicked words when my anger had passed away.

"Then you, whose every act was a mockery of all things holy, would quote Scripture, applicable to me, as an unruly wife. You were so sure of me. Do you remember?

"You were right. I was not dangerous in my stormy moods. My anger was too fleeting. But those gusts of passion were the beginning of the end.

"Each day my heart became harder and colder until it was ice and iron; until the only living thing within me was my hatred of *you*, my husband.

"Always you would have me near you, and I felt as if life itself was ebbing from me in a steady stream of hate, and loathing, and resentment wide enough to sweep you from my sight.

"Yet I was treating you pleasantly, kindly, trying to make both you and the world believe I loved you. For I would not admit I had failed to find happiness.

"Next came the quiet hours when I thought the situation over calmly, and decided you must die. I had borne you as my cross for weary years, trying to make a nobler man of you, and failed. You were so certain you were perfect that you were hopeless. I could do no more.

"It was either your death or mine; that was clear to me. My death would not help you. You would be no better, no nobler with the years; no readier to die, if I passed on and let you live.

"So I decided you must go, even though it was into the darkness, and give me freedom, happiness.

"My decision formed, I delved deeper into those old books on magic, the books you so abhorred, until I mastered their secret.

"It confirmed my belief.

"I could send you from earth if I concentrated the hatred you had bred in my soul, and turned the deadly current on you.

"Coolly, calmly, with inscrutable eyes, I began my task.

"While smiling in your face, listening without a murmur to your jeering, mocking words, I concentrated all the strength of my soul, and sent forth against you magnetic waves that vibrated with hate and bitterness. Always they whispered *'death'*, and your robust health began to

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, drive a lovely car, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You, too, may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you, too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 114, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use, too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 114, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

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fail. When you consulted a physician about your strange symptoms, you, who never had been ill, joy winged my feet. The hatred you had bred in my soul was stronger than you. I would be free!

"THE doctor did not understand your case, and could do nothing for you. In all his experience he had never known a parallel.

"Physically perfect, without a care; contented in your home, and prosperous in your profession; yet you were racked with pain, grew weaker, thinner, paler.

"How you clung to me, begging me to save your life, and asking my forgiveness daily for all your past unkindness!

"You did not intend to hurt me. Oh, no! You were only jesting. You had been harsh, sometimes, because you loved me. On account of your love you expected more of me than of other women; for you loved me tenderly. You blamed me, because you wanted me to be perfect.

"I listened as the sphinx might, while I bathed your aching head. It was too late for the best of excuses. Your words only hastened the end; for they were false as the mirage in the desert, inspired by the fear of death, and the desire to get full service from me—love and care.

"It was so characteristic of you! Never once did you think of me; self was always first. You were consistent to the end.

"Outwardly I was the devoted wife. As always in our married years, I gave you the creature comforts—kindness, too; even that which looked like love. I could afford to be magnanimous.

"Every day you thought the change for the better was at hand—tomorrow you would begin to mend; but each rising sun found you weaker; as I knew it would. Ever that subtle fluid was weakening your life forces, for my singular power became stronger daily.

"You would ask me to take you in my arms and kiss you. Do you remember?

"This was the hardest ordeal of my day—to touch you as would one who loved you. It gave the lie to all that was holiest and best within me, and yet it helped me to success.

"I knew that when the end came it would be when I had to kiss you. All the hatred and loathing and repulsion in me passed then from my soul to yours.

"Sometimes you would faint when your lips touched mine, and the watchers would whisper it was because of your great love for me. They could not read our souls.

"The doctor admitted defeat, and advised me to be brave; the end was coming swiftly. I knew it.

"You wanted a kiss. You would sleep but first I must say good night.

"I knew you would sleep—soundly, too; and I asked if you were ready should death come.

"Your dull eyes, from which life's brightness had faded, flashed with the old, wicked, jealous, suspicious light. You rallied and flung back bitterly:

"'You need not flatter yourself that I will die. You will never have an opportunity to marry another. I shall live to bury you.' Those were your last words.

"I smiled, and then—I took you in my arms. Holding you close to my heart, I kissed you tenderly, once—twice—

"The fountain of my own life stood still in that moment of supreme effort. For an instant I thought my soul was going, too!

"Then with startled eyes, as if in that comprehensive, last glance which swept this world and another, you saw the Unknown in awful guise, spirit and body parted company. I was free!

"Oh, yes, I shed tears, hysterical tears; but they were tears of joy, not sorrow. No one understood, and so they pitied me—the widow. Yet I was delirious with happiness.

"Had I gone from you, and let you live, I would have feared you, though half the world lay between us. Always I would have expected to turn and find you by my side. Now I can defy and mock you; for I do not fear the dead.

"Oh, I am happy!

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"I have my freedom, and Love is waiting somewhere down the way; the love that glorifies a woman's life. Even now, from afar, I feel the presence of the One who will be all to me that you were not.

"Earth could not hold both him and you."

AS I spoke those words to that spirit creature, two malignant eyes stared at me out of space. They were *his* eyes, seemingly suspended in the air over that still figure stretched between us. But such eyes!

They were larger than in life, and stared at me with the expression of one who had faced unnamable horrors. There was that in them I could not fathom. I had seen them reveal evil passions in life; but now the wickedness of a myriad of worlds blazed in their depths. It was as if they had lived all of evil known in all the shining spheres, and were eager, though powerless, to put it into words. There was in those eyes, too, the hopelessness of the lost souls in the Halls of Darkness.

Slowly, slowly, they came toward me, staring into my eyes, burning into my soul their awful message.

They were Death personified; Death come for me!

Instinctively I knew that if shaken with one quiver of fear, I, too, would cross the line to my home-land.

In this crucial moment I faced him serene, smiling, unafraid.

He could not claim my soul. Our paths had parted, never again to touch in any world. Suddenly he, too, knew.

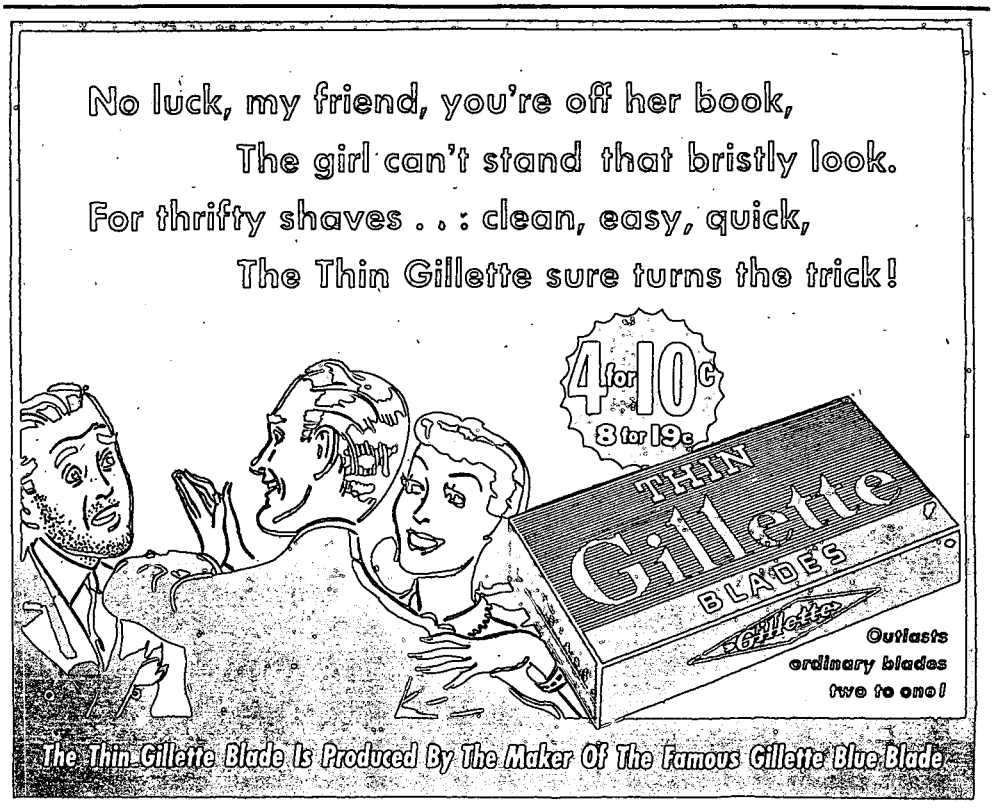
As he realized the truth, and his helplessness, he who had tried to take me with him, a wild, hopeless, bitter cry wailed up and down the room, coming from everywhere at once, and died away like the moans of a sobbing child.

Again an icy blast struck me. Then followed stillness, a strange sense of isolation. Voice and wind and eyes were gone.

He knew all. He knew that he was conquered. He had fled.

I was alone. I was free! . . .

Free? . . .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The Plunge of the "Knupfen"

By LEONARD GROVER

Out of the scientific records of the past, we give you the astonishing account of a voyage into earth's very center

I HAVE many times thought of writing an account of the many strange and wonderful incidents that happened to me during this very last year, but have hesitated from fear that they will be denied credibility.

But at last I have gathered courage, and have set down the amazing details.

I am Robert Wiley Gough.

Three years ago I left my native town, Grafton, in the Old Bay State, and went West to better my fortune.

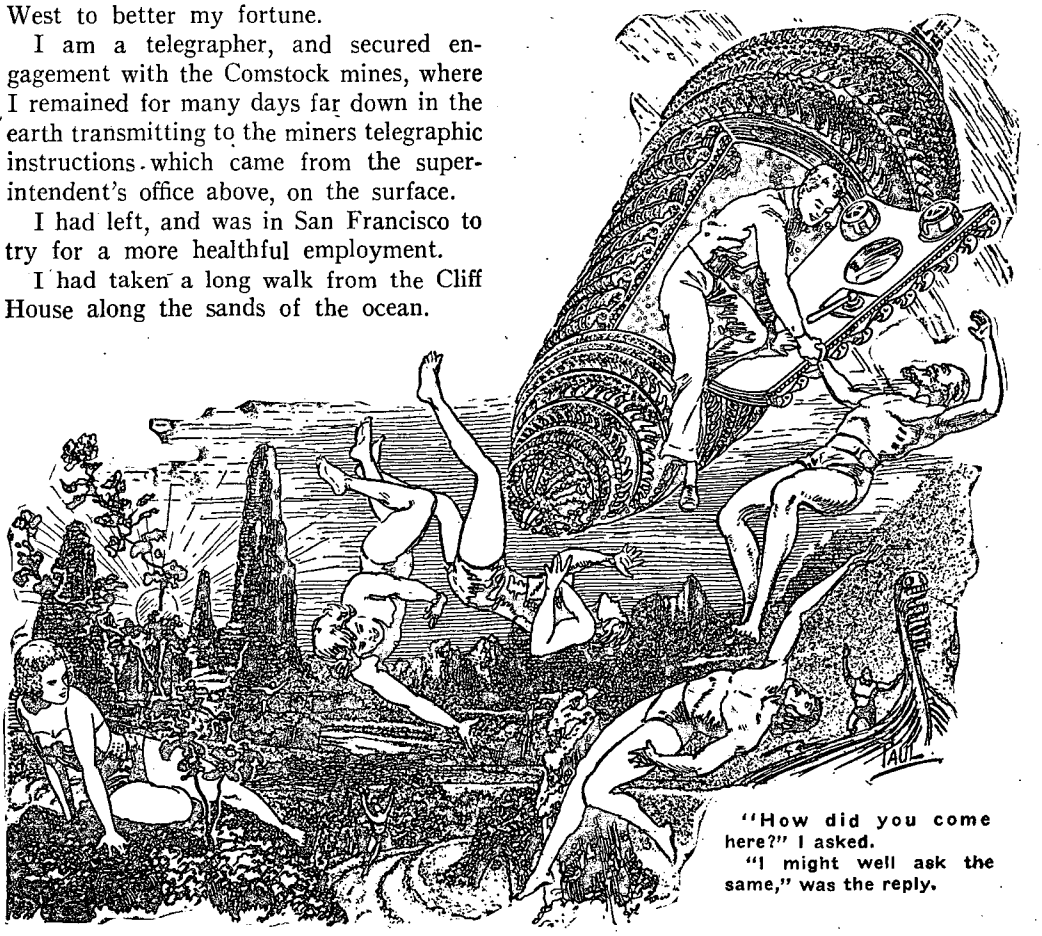
I am a telegrapher, and secured engagement with the Comstock mines, where I remained for many days far down in the earth transmitting to the miners telegraphic instructions which came from the superintendent's office above, on the surface.

I had left, and was in San Francisco to try for a more healthful employment.

I had taken a long walk from the Cliff House along the sands of the ocean.

The pathway for miles was solitary. Not one human being was visible till, some miles inland, a lad told me that I might shorten my journey back to San Francisco by crossing a great sand-dune at the left.

At the summit of this dune I saw a charming picture—a narrow valley surrounded by gray, barren dunes, with a band of the brightest green running through. A row of windmills was irrigating



"How did you come here?" I asked.
"I might well ask the same," was the reply.

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the valley from artesian depths. A group of five great wind-wheels almost overlapping each other provoked my curiosity. The wheels were upheld by a framework of tall, iron stanchions, and below them was a cabin built against the side of the dune.

I drew near to investigate.

As I stepped within the patch of green nearest the cabin, at the door appeared a man who came directly toward me. He was perhaps fifty years old, possessed a pleasant but resolute face, and a stature slightly above the average. His dress was poor and in keeping with his apparent occupation.

He paused squarely in front of me, his appearance plainly inquiring, "What do you want here?"

"Good-day," I ventured. "I was curious to know why you required so many wind wheels for such a small amount of water and garden."

"I might pipe the water to a point below."

That was true. He might be supplying fresh water to a point nearer the ocean. I had no time to press my investigation further, for I was put in the attitude of the answerer rather than the questioner.

I had no reason to conceal anything; and he quickly drew from me my occupation, its association with the Comstock, my present lack of employment—in fact, everything.

At the conclusion of his series of inquiries he invited me inside his cabin.

The wall against the hill was completely covered by a curtain of soiled muslin. I was speculating as to what it might conceal, when he burst in upon my thoughts by recounting the facts he had learned from me.

"You are a telegrapher; you have been far down in the ground for more than a week at a time; you have nothing at present in view. How would you like to secure fifty thousand dollars in gold a month for yourself?"

I made haste to answer:

"Fifty thousand dollars a month is a great deal of money, but I would dearly like to hold down the job for a year."

He said that he was about to advertise for a man when, lo! Providence brought the man to his door. I was just the one for his purpose. Would I listen to him, and swear not to betray him if I declined his offer?

I promised that I would keep his secret.

HIS name was Christian Aldgeldt. He had been professor of chemistry at one of the Eastern colleges. He had experimented and invented. He led me by gradation to a comprehension of his project.

He denied the atomic theory. He was convinced that no one order of matter could be wholly eliminated from all other orders of matter—in a word, that there was gold in everything.

He had been up in the Snake River country above Lewiston, where there were minute quantities of placer-gold in every foot of land along the river. He had become convinced by experiment that this gold was disseminated by atmospheric electricity.

There was a man there known as "the brass monkey." He had seen him. His face bore the look of a broken bar of brass. Under the microscope he discovered particles of gold-dust in his pores.

Investigation disclosed that the man had been to the Hot Springs in Arkansas for medical treatment, and taken the baths, had become saturated with copper, and it was on this copper that the electrical atmosphere was making deposits of gold.

"Now," said he, "gold exists deep in the earth in volatile form, as volatile as quicksilver. The remote volcanic upheaval which threw these great ranges of mountains into being placed the great mass of the precious metal to the west of the Rockies. The greatest deposits of placer gold were found along the valley of the Sacramento.

"The recent discovery of rich placer-

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diggings on the shores of Nome prompted me to examine the sands of the coast of California. Near the watery output of this valley I have found great evidences of it. They tell a story of what lies not too far away.

"These artesian wells run from four hundred to eight hundred feet; one of mine to the depth of one thousand feet. From a bucket of water taken from any one of the wells I am able to secure minute deposits of gold. My deepest well shows an increase over the others.

"Everything points to the fact that beneath this spot, perhaps at a depth not greater than four thousand feet, lies a vast subterranean lake or menstruum of fluid gold."

He paused to see how I had been impressed by his account. At each stage he had shown me evidences of the various deposits. I was awed at his recital.

"But," said I, "you cannot bore an artesian well to the depth of four thousand feet."

"Let me show you."

He drew to one side the muslin curtain.

I saw a great dynamo and behind it a huge rock of iron pyrites. He had covered this rock with a coating of shellac, and had made of it probably the largest storage battery in the world. For nearly two years the steady breeze from the ocean had driven the wind-wheels above which had kept the dynamo in constant action until there was stored, as he alleged, enough power to drive all the machinery of San Francisco for ten days.

Next this at the right was a wedge-shaped box of curious construction, about four feet square by seven in height. The sides were corrugated with ridges of steel scales, which worked very much like the wrinkles of an angelworm.

There was a huge door with a porthole, glazed with a lens, like those of the steamers. The wedge-shaped bottom was covered with many thousands of curious little jointed teeth which, of all things in the world, looked most like the claws of a mole.

Interspersed with these were numerous diamond-pointed drills.

This the professor told me was his "Knupfen." The name can mean "buttons" or sometimes "ready money," I understand.

He had procured from a great Eastern mill countless miles of fine wire, made expressly for this purpose. Glass tubes had been inserted in blocks of iron and drawn to the fineness of a hair, each thread of which held a minute flexible glass tube. Great reels of this stood at the right.

Of the velocity with which the Knupfen could bore into the earth the professor was ignorant. He calculated the action of the teeth at eight thousand six hundred and forty vibrations to the second. Notwithstanding all resistance, he believed that four thousand feet could be reached in twenty-four hours.

The machine carried in its descent a wire for communication and four of the hollow wires. When fluid gold was reached, these were to be operated from above by electrical attraction, and minute streams of gold were to pour into our coffers.

The magnitude of the possibilities awed me. He offered me the half, which I thought unjust to him, and it was stipulated that I was to receive one-fourth.

I reserved the right to draw out when I had received a half-million.

The machine was stored with canned provision, chemicals, and implements.

It was ten o'clock in the evening, on the 6th of January, 1901, after receiving the last instructions from Professor Aldgeldt, that I stepped into the Knupfen for my trip of discovery. One last shake of the hand, a mutual wish for success, and I closed the heavy door and made it fast within.

In an instant I became conscious of a buzzing sound as of a swarm of bees. I caught a glimpse of the professor through the observation port-hole as his hand went out to touch the connecting lever, and in one flash, too quick for the eye to picture, I dropped from him as though from a balloon.

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All was darkness without; an electric burner lighted all within. I had no sense of motion whatever. The buzzing sounds alternately continued and disappeared.

WITHIN ten minutes my ear-drums gave me the sensation which one feels after rapidly descending on the railroad from a great altitude to the depths of the plains below.

This continued, it seemed to me, for an age, but my clock told me that not half an hour had passed when I felt a sense of exhilaration as from a dose of oxygen.

A sound like the pounding of a policeman's night-stick on the pavement disturbed me. It was the clicking of the telegraph.

The professor ticked off: "How are you feeling?"

I described my condition, and inquired: "How far have I gone?"

"You are long past the four thousand footmark. I am now waiting the time when you no longer hear the buzzing sound; you will then have reached the subterranean lake."

"But how far am I?"

"When I signaled you the reel marked fifty-seven miles. Now you are"—a moment's pause while he looked at the indicator—"eighty-six miles."

Good Heavens; and the clock indicated but fifty-one and two-fifth minutes after ten! More than a mile and a half a minute! Impossible; the vast magnetic force had deranged the clock. Certainly the time seemed much longer to me.

"What time is it with you?"

"Eight minutes to eleven."

The clocks were then together. I was lost in astonishment. Could it be possible that I had dropped into the earth with such inconceivable velocity—faster than the flight of the swiftest bird?

After a time the buzzing sound completely ceased. I informed the professor, and he telegraphed me that he had stopped the Knupfen, and that I was now suspended for observation.

I turned to the search-light and saw through the lens that I was surrounded by a fluid body of murky yellow. With the naked eye I could discern particles of gold floating around as one sees them in an electroplating bath.

"Eureka," I wired, "it is here."

"Thank Heaven," fervently responded the professor.

"Are you ready to pump?" I asked.

A short pause and the answer, "All ready!" came over the wire.

Now was a brief interval of acute mental suspense. Had all his long and ingenious labor and my terrible risk gone for naught? The next fifteen minutes would tell the story.

I adjusted the suction wires, and waited for the verdict. In exactly twelve minutes the professor telegraphed:

"We are completely successful. The gold flows and is depositing freely. It will be impossible to determine the extent until after assay tomorrow."

Mutual congratulations were interchanged. We had passed through a long and anxious day. It was now after midnight, and we agreed to seek rest in sleep.

It was nine before the clicking of the instrument awoke me. After a brief interchange of morning compliments, I began my breakfast, and he went to his, two hundred miles above me. This was to be my first of many meals in the bowels of the earth, and I was glad to find that I enjoyed it. The coffee, toast and egg were as appetizing as to a convalescing invalid.

And now the suction wires were placed and the occult forces of electricity once more resumed their work.

It seems odd to me today how, as a mere matter of course, we took our strange situations—interchanging small talk over the wire, and the professor relating to me the current news of the morning San Francisco paper, while the dynamo was filling our store of gold.

Five o'clock in the afternoon arrived, and the professor informed me that he had closed the baths for assay. Four hours followed, when the professor telegraphed:

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"The result is not entirely satisfactory; I must wait till tomorrow morning for further analysis."

All efforts to obtain the approximate amount of the day's work was in vain; and I went to sleep in no enviable frame of mind, awaiting the morrow's results.

It was half past ten the next morning when he informed me:

"We are bitterly disappointed; the total results of yesterday's work are about six dollars and twenty-five cents."

Great Scott, I thought, my share a dollar and thirty cents! At that rate it would be ten centuries before I could secure my half-million. And then the idea came to me—could the professor, who had me at his mercy, be deceiving me—that he might take all for himself?

When the suction wires were set, he needed no further aid from me. Might he not keep them perpetually working, and me in ignorance of the result? I promptly disconnected the wires.

He soon telegraphed:

"You have severed the wires; that is right. Scarcely more than one dollar of fluid gold can be forced through each one in a day. Not compensation for one one-thousandth part of the power used in obtaining it."

It was true that all our hopes were frustrated. All effort was to be abandoned. Now I must be on my way back to the surface once more.

"Well," wired I, "the sooner you give me directions to return, the better I shall be pleased."

A long delay, and the professor answered:

"My dear Mr. Gough, as Heaven is my judge, I have never given sufficient thought to your return."

Great Jove!

I had been such an absolute, driveling idiot, actuated by the blinding thirst for gold, as to rush headlong into an abyss of a depth equaling the width of New England, without bestowing thought upon my method of return.

True, I had only bargained for a depth of four thousand feet. I had been about that distance in the Comstock mines, but here, nearly three hundred miles of direct descent, with no thought of—my mind wavered, and for a time I was insane with sorrow.

Oh, how I cursed the infernal infatuation for gold. Here was I, surrounded by a vast subterranean sea filled with the precious metal. What could it do to relieve me? A fitting grave for greed.

Then followed some bitter words.

"What can be done?"

"Positively nothing."

NOTHING was more certain than that my condition was unalterable—I was doomed, and already buried alive.

I pass any attempt to describe my feelings for the next twelve hours.

On the morning of the third day, Professor Aldgeldt called me to the instrument and made this suggestion.

"I am more to blame than you. Also, I am the greater sufferer; my years of work wasted—how I wish I was in your place. I should at least be spared the accusing thought of having doomed you to a living tomb.

"There is only one source of solace. Grand men, in the interest of science, have given their lives to the knife of the experimenting surgeon, or the inoculation of the poisonous microbe. You are now in a position from which no man has hitherto been able to send back accounts of his discoveries. We are denied our gold.

"You at least may obtain lasting fame; I, some glory for my invention and the power to recount your exploration. Go on then, my friend, even to the extent of all these miles of connecting wires; and should your life last, you will be able to tell the world, through me, of all those wonders which the speculations of scientists have but imperfectly determined."

History chronicles two Hobsons. One was the hero of a naval exploit, the other famed in legend as the person who was given but one choice. My condition offered nothing but Hobson's choice.

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I had to die, anyway. The store of provisions would last two months. My condition would not be one of exactly solitary confinement. There was the companionship of the telegraph, and communication with the upper world at any moment. I would enjoy my few remaining days in seeing all I could.

I had consented—and again the Knupfen was boring through stone and lake and rock, at a slight diminution of its previous speed.

I became reconciled to the situation. There was much to interest me in every waking hour. I admitted water from the exterior through an orifice, and found it, in the main, fresh and wholesome.

From fear that my store of compressed air would run short, the professor instructed me in an easy method of making a little oxygen from potassium with a crucible. The gas flowed through the vapor of some boiling water, and absorbed the nitrogen from some stalks of the canned asparagus, which, with the cooling effect of a minute quantity of ether, made a very agreeable atmosphere.

Light is only relative—and in time I became accustomed to the gloom, and could discern objects without the aid of the searchlight. It was indeed very curious, in some of the vast subterranean seas to witness the efforts of huge, uncouth monsters to follow the glare of the search-light as I sped by them in my downward course.

Day followed day.

The professor had arranged matters so that my descent was undiminished while he slept. With each twenty-four hours, I was reeling off nearly a thousand miles. But we were not able to determine to what degree my course had varied from a direct line, as, though our clocks remained in accord, I had no method of determining by the sun how far I had swerved while passing through the various bodies of water.

And now there was a very perceptible diminution in speed, and the clicking of the telegraph became fainter and fainter with each hour. I had reeled off three thousand two hundred and some odd miles when the Knupfen burst into what appeared, at first, to be a huge sea.

Here all the water seemed transparent, and not materially differing from the water of the surface. I felt a strong current and knew that my course was deflected. After three hours of this the Knupfen dropped out of it and into an open condition of the light of day.

Through the observation lens I could discern what appeared to be mountains, dales, landscapes and groves of varied hues, from light lilac to the rich crimson of a Jacqueminot rose.

As I looked out, I might have been in a balloon over some spot of fairy-land.

I tried to describe the scene on the wire. I had dragged from the reels over four thousand miles. I informed Professor Aldgeldt that the great length of wire had reduced the strength of the current.

"No," he answered, in the scarcely perceptible vibrations of the instrument, "you are nearing the center of the earth. The positive and negative forces are nearing their point of merger. The attraction of gravitation has almost terminated. I can only see the pulsations of your instrument by the aid of a powerful glass. Yes, I hear you; oh, so faintly."

The Knupfen ceased to move.

The positive center of gravity held it still, and without undulation.

I seemed to be suspended in a sort of mid-air, between those fairy grottoes below, and that sky of transparent water above.

Now I could see by the objects through my observation-lens, as I changed my position, that the Knupfen rocked as though I were in a boat on the water. I could only see; I did not feel the rocking.

WHILE it was evident that the floor was at a slant of thirty or forty degrees, I stood straight out from the floor like the peg of a top, no matter in what direction it moved.

A small scale, put on board for the purpose of weighing ore samples, was stowed

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away on a shelf at the top. I started to step on a seat and reach up for it, when, judge of my surprise as the mere effort lifted me like a toy balloon.

As I raised the scale from the shelf, its avoirdupois was no more than that of a piece of tissue-paper.

Its weighing capacity was ten pounds. I placed it on the floor and stepped on it; I might just as well have put the tissue-paper on the scale. The balancing bar simply quivered and rested. Yet, when I pressed my foot in an effort to raise the bar, it sprang to the top.

It was plain that effort was the only thing that possessed weight.

I summoned courage, and opened the door to look out upon this strange world within a world.

At a distance of what seemed a hundred yards there appeared an object which was an exact reproduction of the Knupfen, but as large as a house. This moved about and danced in the air, then suddenly dissolved into a cloud of many-colored sparks.

In a brief time these sparks reassembled. Imagine my surprise when they offered a reproduction of the Knupfen, but this time with the door open, and a grotesque figure of myself looking out; nodding, winking, leering, and again disappearing in a cloud.

These many-colored sparks continued their performance with far more than the effects of a kaleidoscope, presenting a bit of the fair landscape from below, and again three human figures, one with a long beard, and other objects, but always prancing, dancing, or grimacing.

I learned afterward that these were the mocking-flies, a great swarm of insects, each of a different tint, comprising all the various hues known to color, and who flew into position like the fragments of a mosaic, thus mocking and tantalizing whatever pleased their fancy.

As this wonderful swarm flew away, I could now see approaching what surely seemed like human beings. Among them I discovered the man with the long beard.

Now, this was a strange sight indeed. There were perhaps twenty of them. They separated and gathered like a flock of birds. They were in every conceivable position. Some were coming horizontally, and some with their heads downward and their feet in the air.

Breech-clouts of various hue seemed their only costume.

They came on, examining minutely every part of the Knupfen, pulling me out into the open, continually jabbering, in a tongue from which I could occasionally glean a word of old Saxon.

But I must now tell you what wonders befell me when I found myself outside the Knupfen. At once I was like those others. It made no difference to me from whichever point of the compass my feet radiated.

Far below was a ball of sapphire light which might have been a sun. Across the horizon was another ball of pale, emerald green, which should be a moon. In all directions—above, below, right, left, and everywhere—were little dots of sparkling color which one would think were stars.

The man with the long beard approached. His eyes were kind, his face benevolent, though too young to be patriarchal. He seized me by the hand with a welcoming shake.

The effort sent my legs in the air, as well as his own; and we continued in converse with our heads together and our feet at a tangent, like the spreading prongs of a pair of tongs.

In a brief time I found we were able to make ourselves understood each to the other. He spoke a sort of cross between English and Scandinavian.

My first inquiry necessarily was:

"How came you here?"

"I might equally as well ask you how you and others came upon the surface of the earth," he answered, "but that would be a much more difficult and far less reasonable question to answer than your inquiry. All those of us who were not born here came by the maelstrom, off the coast of Norway."

"How?"

"The ships that are swallowed within

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its vortex are drawn swiftly to the center. The plunge is so rapid that the air below deck has no opportunity to escape. The descending water, when it passes the portals of the inner shell, is thrown by the centrifugal force of the earth's revolutions against the outside, much as you see the water mass against the side in a rapidly whirled bucket. Usually nearly all survive the voyage."

"How do you live?"

"We live as do the fish—we breathe our food. All parts of this ozonic sphere are pregnant with life-prolonging power. Nor are the pleasures of the palate denied us. Just here, near the center, the conditions are comparatively neutral.

"But I will take you to dells and grottoes where you shall enjoy in perfection all the sensations of gastronomical delights, from exquisitely cooked game to the pungency of rare cheese, supplemented by the exhilaration of choicest vintages. All comes with an effort of your will."

I paused here to say that shortly after, in the delightful company of a most charming lady I passed completely through one of these ideal banquets taken in, as do the fish, by the way of the gills. And all without the necessity of tipping a waiter or the jarring effect of changing dishes.

I have not the time to recount the many wonders each moment offered.

This heart of the world was called Aquavolant—Flying-water.

THERE was a great lodestone in the Grotto of Extremis, to which they journeyed at long intervals, the properties of which renewed their vitality. But one death had been known, and he, poor fellow, took his own life through violent jealousy.

My friend, whose name was Harold Oleson, came in the year 1742. He was accounted the ablest scientist. From him I learned the natural solution of many of the wonders. Additional wrecks, from time to time, had kept them fairly conversant with the external world.

The oldest settlers came with one of Caesar's galleys, some years B.C. The galley had separated from its consorts during a storm at night in the English Channel, and so sailed on to the maelstrom.

By far the greater number were Scandinavians.

Friend Oleson informed me that the light of day came from the focusing of the earth's volatile electricity; that the apparent sun, moon, and stars were reflections of the real solar system without, transferred through minute globules of vapor, like the mirages seen on the surface.

He took me to his laboratory and showed me how, through vaporous reflection, he was able to determine the constantly creating new chemical combinations within the earth.

He pointed out the encroaching of great veins of quicksilver forcing a way through fissures toward the vast sulfurbeds under Hecla.

He explained that this was creating a prodigious quantity of sulfurate of mercury, one of the very highest explosives, and that the result of the next eruption would be to disrupt and throw out into space, in one huge body, England, Scotland, and Ireland, when they would undoubtedly become a second moon to the earth.

I could not help but think: "What will the Boers think of that?" and "What will be the ultimate settlement of the Irish question?"

Among my early acquaintances I had the honor of a presentation to the one most esteemed, and who by common consent bore the title of Regina.

She is a very beautiful lady, and is the one with whom I dined. She was the only female who survived the arrival of the Roman galley.

She was the daughter of the nephew of the great Cicero, and was early married to Claudius Hesperius, one of Caesar's generals. The galley offered too little deck protection for the great maelstrom plunge, and many of its occupants

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perished, among them the general, her husband.

On account of her great beauty, she was called from infancy Pulchra, and from the fact of her early accompanying Hesperius to camp she still hears the name of Pulchra and Castra.

Oleson warned me that the novel method of my arrival had very much interested her, and that she was sure to lay siege to my affections.

When I met her and saw the infinite beauty of her face of twenty years, the exquisite symmetry of her form, her soulful eyes, the soft charm of her manners, and listened to the sweet tones of her enrapturing voice, I succumbed completely.

In brief, we have been married now nearly a year, and every day I find a new charm in her personality, which adds to the fervor of my affections.

I kept up an occasional correspondence with Professor Aldgeldt, who told me that the descriptions of my surroundings were valueless, as they were discredited. And yet, they have wireless telegraphy, the entering X-ray, and many things more wonderful than my experience.

Though without the new inventions, it was extremely well supplied with the conventional implements of science. He has some crystals peculiar to Aquavolant, which possess the power to focus and magnify objects reflected through the earth's vapor atoms. It took a long time to isolate an object on the surface which one could recognize.

Though the sun and moon seemed to bear about their usual positions, he felt sure that they were reflected at a violent tangent, and offered no guide as to the real position of any external place.

I suggested that we get the exact time from Professor Aldgeldt, at San Francisco, and so establish the reflected sun's position.

He instantly saw the advantage of this, and we telegraphed the professor, who directed our movements. He was to send over the wire a single dot, the letter *s*, which we were instantly to repeat to him. We did this, and he informed us that the transference to and from took nine and one-fifth seconds. The electric spark had taken four and one-tenth seconds in reaching us. By this we were able to set our time and calculate by the meridian of San Francisco.

The focus of the crystals was switched toward the east to Massachusetts Bay and back to Worcester, where, feeling our way around that city, I was enabled to recognize Grafton, and, in time, to see my parents and one of my sisters, who were eating their noonday meal.

My wife came with me to see her new relatives by marriage. She then expressed a great desire to return once more to the surface and visit her own home. It was in vain to explain that two thousand years had completely changed Rome, which was no longer queen of the world.

To my great surprise, Oleson declared that he believed it possible, through the agency of the Knupfen. The great central lodestone would supply the power, which, with the machine reversed and the rodent-claws on top, would, he believed, enable the Knupfen to eat its way back to the surface.

By opening an easy channel, a portion of the inner sea might be so directed that its centrifugal force would aid in the propulsion, and ultimately toss it out, like a cork on the top of a geyser.

We promised to come back to Aquavolant by way of the maelstrom.

WE FIRST induced Professor Aldgeldt to free all the wires from above, except one. We secured some old windlasses from the wrecks, and reeled the wires on them. The channel was dug, ready for the gate to be opened the moment the Knupfen had secured a foothold the measure of its length.

There still remained in store enough of food.

Mindful of certain necessities on the surface, I filled an empty asparagus-can

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with rare gems, superb diamonds, rubies, and sapphires.

I had been eight months in Aquavolant, and was about to leave it with great reluctance. It was the twelfth of last September when we made our start. All the inhabitants, old and young, from babes in arms to those of near two thousand years, collected to see us off.

The driving wires were attached to the lodestone, a separate wire for communication was run from Oleson's laboratory, when I placed our fate in his hands and we bade all good-by.

The great door was closed, and the familiar buzzing sound recommenced. The superior power of the lodestone quickened our voyage, and it was four days and four hours when the Knupfen spurted out and fell flat on its side on a great plain.

The water continued flowing for ten hours, and then subsided. I opened the door—we were in the light of day.

All around us was a thin covering of snow and ice.

By directions of Oleson, I plumbed a stick three feet in height to a horizontal spirit level.

At the sun's noon I took the measure of the stick's shadow falling on the level, and measured the distance from the stick's base to the point of the shadow. I telegraphed the distance to Oleson. He got the time from Professor Aldgeldt, at San Francisco, and, after calculating, informed me that we were 178 degrees west from San Francisco, and just south of the sixtieth parallel. That we were in Siberia. He would locate us by the crystals, and tell us of the nearest town.

The Knupfen had carried me completely through the earth.

On the morning I learned that we were near thirty miles north of Kadovsky, on the Great Siberian Railway, I made efforts to get a sledge, and, abandoning for the time the Knupfen, we were soon on the cars, and speeding toward Russia.

At St. Petersburg I made sale of three fine diamonds, and procured some fashionable costumes for my dear Pulchra.

She would listen to nothing but that she should revisit Rome. Thither we went, where her disappointment at the change wrought by centuries was complete.

She pointed out to me her former box in the ruins of the Colosseum, where she had witnessed the frays of the gladiators and the sacrifices of the slaves. She was horrified at the wretched condition of her beloved Tiber.

I think nothing so completely contributed to her desire to get away from the place as the fact that she could not find a single soothsayer in the city.

We started on our way to take steamer from Liverpool, pursuing almost the identical pathway that she had taken with Caesar's army, those many centuries before. It really was strange and wonderful to witness her point out some place where they gave the Gauls a peppering.

From the public she attracted no observation, except for her extreme beauty, most people taking her for my daughter.

But when she dropped into reminiscence, they gazed at each other with puzzled looks.

We have been in America now four months, and have visited my parents at their home.

At Boston, we cannot help but feel a sense of superiority; for we know who really are the aristocracy of the Hub. Professor Aldgeldt has joined us, and we pass many hours explaining our wonders and talking of dear Oleson, with his hundred and sixty years, who, we feel, is far down there below, over his crystals, and fondly watching our every move.

We have purchased one of the submarine boats, and are preparing to return to the Aquavolant next May.

We take with us the newest appliances for wireless telegraphy, and feel that we shall perfect communication from the center to the circumference sooner than others will achieve whisperings over the ocean.

And now I may say, if there are any who would like to join us in the trip, they may advise me at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, in New York.

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The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to The Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, 280 Broadway, N. Y.

"Radio Man" Is Great

F.F.M. has, in its short span, completely won me over. The December issue was the best yet. We fans asked for a monthly; we got it. We asked for Paul and Finlay, and got them, too. This is certainly a favorable reflection on F.F.M.'s desires to please its audience, in which aim it has succeeded admirably. May it continue in this same fresh, healthy spirit for the years to come.

Topping the December line-up was Farley's "The Radio Man." Although I'd never had the pleasure of reading his Radio-Trilogy, or part of it, before this, I can easily see why the old-timers persist in their raves about it. It's great! The type of story I—and a host of others, I'll wager—have been waiting to read again. Not the sterile, heavy-science kind; nor the trashy, plotless, sexy kind either.

Farley, when he wrote the "Radio Man," had a distinctly Weinbaumish touch which, I hope, he retains and utilizes for future classics to appear in F.F.M. Close upon Farley's heels come Marshall's "Who is Charles Avison?" and Flint's "The Lord of Death." Of course "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" is in a class all by itself, and it becomes more engrossing every installment. How about the sequel to Cummings' "The Girl in the Golden Atom" soon?

Now as to your policy of choosing the stories for re-publication. I hold out for an unfixed, loose method of selection. Who cares if the tale was written in 1900 or 1939? After all, it's the story that counts, the fact that it is a classic, not its age. So make a nice balance of it. Give us the older ones and the newer ones mixed. But they must be outstanding; that should go without saying.

As to authors whose works—the newer stories, that is—would be appreciated, here is a list. They are of the semi-oldtime class, and the majority of them are still active:

Coblentz, P. S. Miller, Cummings, Burks, Keller, Williamson, Weinblum, Vincent, Binder, E. E. Smith, Hamilton, Campbell, Jr., Merritt, Taine, Manning, and, of course, Lovecraft.

WALTER S. MUSIL.

CLEVELAND, OHIO

About December Issue

Again I write; to tell you that the third issue is even better than the first two, and that is saying a lot.

Why not reprint: "When the Sun Stopped," *June 1904, Argosy*; "The Planet Juggler," Nov. 1908, All-Story; "When Time Slipped a Cog," Jan. 1905, All-Story?

Sincerely thanking you in advance I am

LEON BLATT.

PHILA., PA.

Farley Fan

You are doing a great job so far and please try to maintain the high peak you have set in the first three issues.

The December issue was superb, first place going to Farley's masterpiece "The Radio Man." This is the type of story I go wild over. Fighting the "Radio Man" all the way was "The Lord of Death," a crackerjack of a story! Give us more of Homer Eon Flint. The "Conquest of the Moon Pool" is coming along swell and I can hardly wait for the next installment. A great story by a great author. Three cheers to him! All the other stories were great with the exception of Giesy's "The Gravity Experiment." I don't think humorous stories belong in our mag. Why can't you publish some of Giesy's classics, "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," "The Mouthpiece of Zitu" and "Jason, Son of Jason"?

FRANCIS J. MOROFF.

BRONX, N. Y.

Wants F.F.M. Weekly

As secretary of our Science Fiction Club I have been asked by the members to write you a letter to attempt to induce you print your magazine, FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES, twice a month or even weekly instead of monthly.

The people who have already seen your magazine will buy it as often as you bring it out. If anything more frequent publication will make it more popular.

Hoping you will print twice a month, I remain—

ROBERT BERG.

FLUSHING, N. Y.

Good Suggestions

The third issue of your magazine has definitely placed it among the foremost of the magazines specializing in science-fiction. Of course, the reason is obvious. The majority of your stories are selected from the finest of ARGOSY'S splendid fund of fantasy.

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At present, at least, your covers lend quite an air of distinction to the magazine. However, I would like to see an illustrative one by Paul or Finlay.

The illustrations were all exceptional. Paul did his best work for some time, while Finlay has yet to do a poor interior piece. Both artists are supreme in the fantasy field mainly because of the fine detail they put into their illustrations.

The poem this month was fine, but then I still think the author's biographical sketch idea I proposed last month is worth a trial. Why not put it to the readers' decision via an editorial note somewhere in the next issues?

Please do not omit the *Readers' Viewpoint Department.* It is very important.

The stories themselves were of unusual merit and rate as follows:

"The Lord of Death" was a fine inter-planetary yarn, but more than that it is a splendid character study. Strokor's tremendous personality relegated every other character to a relatively weak and colorless background. "The Radio Man" is also a fine interplanetary story and promises the beginning of a wonderful series, part of which is "Radio Beasts" and "Radio Planet". The second part of "Conquest of the Moon Pool" builds up to one of the greatest science fiction classics. Merritt is one of the few authors whose work does not lag between parts.

"Lights" and "The Diminishing Draft" are truly gems of fantasy. While not strictly science fiction they nevertheless belong in F. F. M. "The Gravity Experiment", while having a rather threadbare plot is very amusing.

"Who Is Charles Avison?" is mainly an incredible network of coincidence with not a shred of plausibility. One of the most obvious flaws was the failure of the earth astronomers to discover the "other earth" through the effects its gravity would have on the orbits of the earth-moon system.

SAM YAPOLSKY.

WINNIPEG, MAN., CANADA

How About Baroturpinol?

Read your December issue of FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES and thought it very astonishing. Especially "The Diminishing Draft."

I have studied the microscopic animal called the parameba. Can such a thing happen to the low animals? Is there such a chemical as baroturpinol with such powers of shrinkage? If so, write and tell me about it. What are some of the powers of salt over the growing of an animal that has shrunk?

I am very much interested in this because I am making a home study of this subject.

PATRICK FONTAINE.

CLEARWATER, FLORIDA

Wants Cover Picture

Concerning your fine new magazine, FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES. Personally I can't think of any magazines of this type that are any better although there are many books on the market. So far your choice has been very good and I can't complain.

I would like to see some departments in the mag., for all science-fiction or fantasy books have some. First of all I would like a readers' department every month. Second, I would like to have a section devoted to the listing of the stories from previous issues in the order of their popularity, for it would be interesting to see how these old favorites compare when they are placed together. And, third, I would appreciate an editors' department concerning the magazine in general.

I see that you are running one of the Radio series now, for which I am thankful.

A word about your covers; I would appreciate something more than a list of names and stories. Something by Finlay would be appropriate. He does his best work for your mag. and as long as you have him for inside illustrations you might have him do your covers. How about some illustrations inside of stories; not just one at the start? I hope you at least start some of my proposed departments.

NORMAN KNUDSON.

OGDEN, UTAH

Don't Forget Garrett P. Serviss

May I congratulate you on bringing forth a magazine of fantastic reprints for which there has been a crying need for at least five years and perhaps ten? I must confess that at first I was up in arms over "The Moon Pool", but then I had the book and did not know that the story was in two separate efforts.

As for story selection I am sure that almost any of the earlier stories published in the ARGOSY-ALL STORY will suffice and these old masterpieces will still make fantastic readers sit up and take notice.

Personally I cast my vote for ANYTHING by A. Merritt the peer of them all. Also all the "Golden Atom" stories by Cummings, more "Radio" stories by Farley and George Allan England's longer stories. Also Flint and Hall.

My one complaint is that F. F. M. doesn't come out oftener.

Entirely too many of these worthwhile fantastic novels have been buried in the files. Like "The Ship of Ishtar", "The Blind Spot", "Phantom in the Rainbow", "Dwellers in the Mirage", etc., etc.

Also please do not forget good old Garrett P. Serviss as you go along.

Your book is worthy of all the support that readers of the old ALL-STORY and ARGOSY can give it.

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I am wondering if A. Merritt is still living If so I am most anxious to obtain his address as I have several very interesting facts for him concerning some of his novels.

RICHARD G. CLARK.

CENTERVILLE, IOWA

"Moon Pool" Grand Fun

In "Fantastic" I feel that you are really giving the public what we want. At least those of us who revel in the thrilling experiences of our imaginary friends, who so ably break the monotony of our every day lives.

I think the whole staff of F. F. M., can, with assurance, run around the office slapping each other on the back.

I lent my first copy to numerous friends—one of the more avid readers did not return it—and I want to keep each number. So will you be so kind as to send me a copy? I especially enjoy Mr. Merritt's stories.

Thank you again for the grand fun I've had to date.

CONSTANCE KRAUS.

HOLLYWOOD, CALIF.

Welcome to F.F.M.

Another of the old guard speaks! I welcome F. F. M. because, although I have all of the old "different" stories, most of them are gently falling to pieces. Time and termites have taken their toll after twenty-five years!

From the letters I see that the right suggestions are being made for reprints. Don't forget Philip F. Fisher, however, whose "Devil of the Western Sea" and "Fungus Isle" are gems.

As for my opinion, regarding the classics, etc., I still believe "The Blind Spot" to be the finest single story, Abe Merritt the most powerful single writer, and "Three Lines of Old French" by Merritt, the best single short story.

May you prosper mightily. You would find it hard to believe what a wealth of tender regard we old-timers have for the old tales. And we aren't so old, either!

DARYL MCALLISTER.

OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLA.

Charmed With Classics

In my opinion, FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES is the most important contribution to the realm of fantastic literature that has been made in years. For a long time I have heard of the great stories published long before the first science-fiction magazine was printed. Of course, I wanted to read them but they were nearly impossible to obtain. Now, along comes F. F. M. and not only makes it possible to get the old classics at a moderate price but gives the reader the pick of the lot, the ones that have held their charm down through the years!

The general set-up of the magazine is very good, smooth edges give the later two issues a more neat appearance. The paper is good and the type clean and sharp. Also the illustrations have been of an unusually high order. You seem to have used rare judgment in your choice of the proper artist for each story. Finlay excels in the more fantastic and beautiful type of picture and people. Paul is at his best when depicting alien scenery or creatures—also machines.

The covers are quite O. K. as they are. I would not like to see them covered with lurid scenes that would make one half ashamed to be seen with the magazine; however, I have no objection to cover pictures if you choose them as carefully as you have inside illustrations.

The stories I like best were: THE MOON POOL, THE WITCH-MAKERS, THE WIMPUS, KARPEN THE JEW, THE GIRL IN THE GOLDEN ATOM, THE MOON METAL, THE RADIANT ENEMIES, THE DIMINISHING DRAFT and THE LORD OF DEATH. I won't rate THE RADIO MAN and THE CONQUEST OF THE MOON POOL as I will wait till I have all the parts before I read them.

MARTIN ALGER.

MACKINAW CITY, MICHIGAN

Likes Interplanetary Yarns

Having critically read the first two issues of F. F. M. and the many letters from the readers in the November issue, I am adding my suggestions.

A. I was disappointed by the conspicuous lack of feminine interest in all of the stories for November. I am still young enough and emotional enough to believe that romance rules the world and makes it a finer place to live in.

B. How about a little more of the "I" in the author's viewpoint and less of the "so-and-so-told him and he told me" idea?

C. Though I am no great authority on Fantasy, I do have my preferences and it tends toward the human, action packed adventure on other planets and other worlds. Less of such "mind" stuff as Blade's "Fruit of the Forbidden Tree." Humor as portrayed in "Blind Man's Bluff" is excellent.

D. I believe the cover should be illustrated, even if a chap has to hide the magazine beneath his coat as he sneaks down the street from the drug store.

E. As time passes, original stories should replace the reprints entirely except for the long serials. At least two of the latter should be run in each issue.

After saying all of this, as constructive criticism, I hope, let me assure you that F. F. M. is O. K. with me.

STANLEY H.

PARDEEVILLE, WIS.

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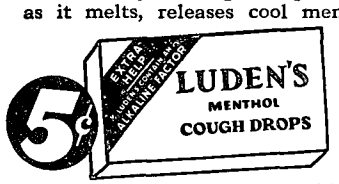

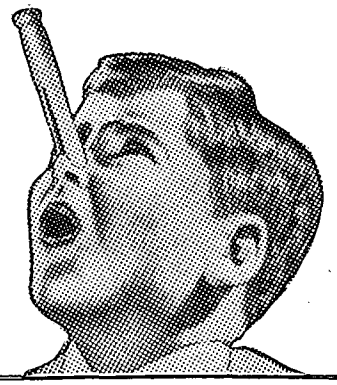

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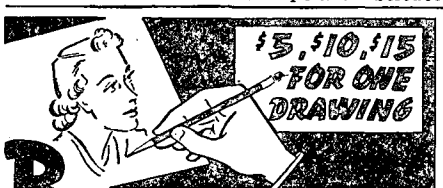

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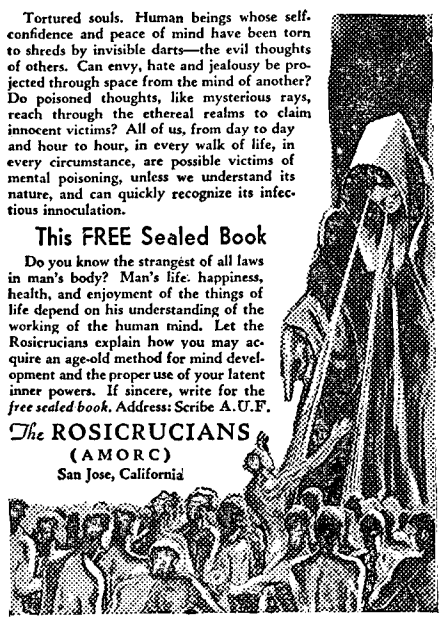

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Buffalo, N. Y.

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GOOD FRIENDS AGREE—

"THERE'S EXTRA PLEASURE . . AND EXTRA SMOKING IN CAMELS!"

NORTH, East, South, West, you'll hear the same story: One true yardstick of cigarette pleasure is *slow* burning! Kenneth E. (Nick) Knight *(below, left)* confirms the experience of millions of smokers when he says: "One of the first things I noticed about Camels was their slow burning. I figure that's why Camels [illegible]ke so much cooler, milder and taste so much better." Howard McCrorey adds: "To me Camel's slow burning means extra pleasure and extra smoking per pack."

Yes, the *costlier tobaccos* in Camels are *slower-burning!* Enjoy extra pleasure and extra value in America's No. 1 cigarette...Camels!

CAMELS—LONG-BURNING COSTLIER TOBACCOS

Whatever price you pay per pack, it's important to remember this fact: By burning 25% *slower* than the average of the 15 other of the largest-selling brands tested—slower than *any* of them—CAMELS give a smoking *plus* equal to

5 EXTRA SMOKES PER PACK!

Cigarettes were compared recently...sixteen of the largest-selling brands . . . under the searching tests of impartial laboratory scientists. Findings were announced as follows:

1 CAMELS were found to contain MORE TOBACCO BY WEIGHT than the average for the 15 other of the largest-selling brands.

2 CAMELS BURNED *SLOWER* THAN ANY OTHER BRAND TESTED—25% SLOWER THAN THE AVERAGE TIME OF THE 15 OTHER OF THE LARGEST-SELLING BRANDS! By burning 25% slower, on the average, Camels give smokers the equivalent of 5 EXTRA SMOKES PER PACK!

3 In the same tests, CAMELS HELD THEIR ASH FAR *LONGER* than the average time for all the other brands.

MORE PLEASURE PER PUFF... MORE PUFFS PER PACK!

PENNY FOR PENNY YOUR BEST CIGARETTE BUY

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